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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores how urban public school teachers navigate the contradictory social position of having little power over their work and considerable power over their students. This qualitative interpretive study begins from a perspective that is attentive to and critical of both (a) *neoliberal approaches to education*, particularly the market-based, audit culture logics and practices that devalue, discipline and target teachers as workers, and (b) the racialized *deficit discourse*, a predominant framework in urban schools—often taken up by urban teachers—that blames poor urban youth and youth of color for school problems, constructs them as objects in need of control and correction, and misrepresents their families and communities. Rather than study urban teachers as simply figures worthy of defense from neoliberal effects *or* as objects worthy of blame for their deficit-inspired perspectives on urban students, this dissertation examines how urban teachers negotiate both of these powerful, complicated and often interrelated forces in their teaching. This research shines a light on urban teachers, not to add to their hypervisibility as problems, but to explore the complexities of urban teachers' work which are largely invisible. This multi-sited ethnography traces how teachers make sense of these blaming discourses in two urban educational contexts: Teach For America (TFA), a national program that recruits college graduates to teach in poor schools, and Project Voice, a small, university-based research project that aimed to develop a model for adults to collaborate with urban students to improve their schools. Findings indicate that despite that urban teachers were often critical of the neoliberal pressures that constrained their work, the deficit discourse constructed urban students *themselves* as primary constraints for teachers. Deficit discourse was not all-encompassing, and some teachers resisted it, but deficit thinking seemed to intensify in conjunction with neoliberalism.

DEFICIT DISCOURSE, URBAN TEACHERS' WORK AND THE BLAME GAME

by

Heidi Pitzer

B.A. Syracuse University, 2005
M.A. University of Cincinnati, 2007

Dissertation

Submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Cultural Foundations of Education

Syracuse University
December 2014

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This dissertation makes connections between two significant areas of educational research that, while increasingly studied, are often studied separately from one another: the disdain for public school teachers (as well as other public institutions and public workers), and the inadequate, unjust education of urban students in the U.S. I examine how urban public school teachers navigate the contradictory social position of having little power over their work and considerable power over their students. This qualitative interpretive study begins from a perspective that is attentive to and critical of *both* 1) *neoliberal approaches to education*, particularly the market-based, “audit culture” (Apple, 2005) logics and practices that devalue, discipline and target teachers as workers, and 2) the racialized *deficit discourse*, a predominant framework in urban schools—often taken up by urban teachers—that blames poor urban youth and youth of color for school problems, constructs them as objects in need of control and correction, and misrepresents their families and communities. Rather than study urban teachers as simply figures worthy of defense from neoliberal effects *or* as objects worthy of blame for their deficit-inspired perspectives on urban students, this dissertation reveals how urban teachers negotiate both of these powerful, complicated and often *interrelated* forces in their teaching. My research shines a light on urban teachers, not to add to their hypervisibility as problems, but to give voice to urban teachers and to explore the complexities of their work which are largely invisible. This multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995; see also Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 76) traces how teachers make sense of these blaming discourses in two urban educational contexts: Teach For America (TFA), a national program that recruits college graduates to teach in poor

schools, and “Project Voice”¹, a small, university-based research project that aimed to develop a model for adults to collaborate with urban students to improve their schools. Drawing on data primarily from in-depth interviews with urban teachers, I examine how teachers in these two different settings negotiate the “blame game” and make meaning of their work, their students, and their identities as urban teachers.

Blame Game Tensions

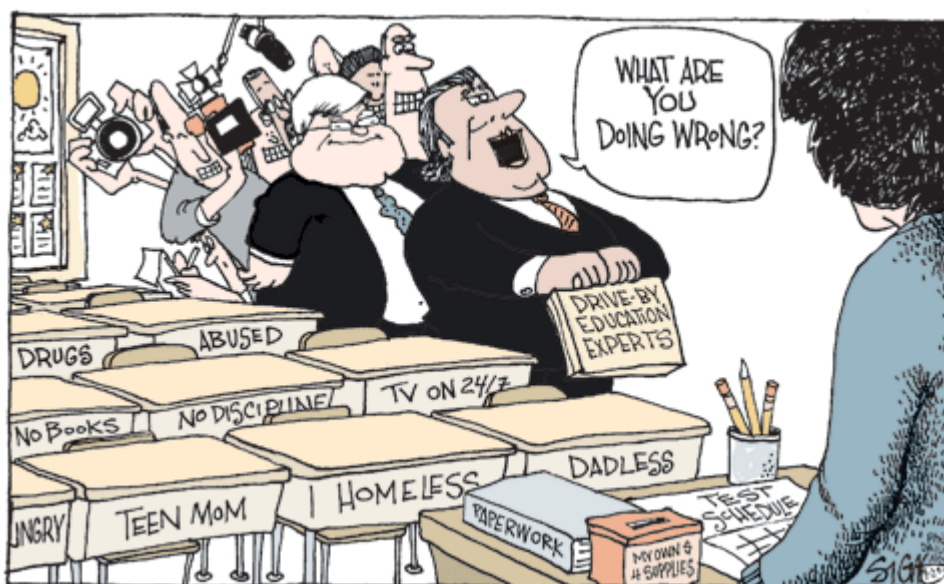


Figure 1. Political cartoon blaming teachers.

This political cartoon (Figure 1) by Wilkinson (2009) captures some of the tensions I heard in urban teachers’ talk, and it helps to illuminate what I am calling the blame game. We see a teacher at her desk, with some of the constraints she faces highlighted: a big stack of “paperwork,” a piggy bank of sorts labeled, “my own \$ 4 supplies,” and of course some testing materials for the all-important standardized tests. In addition to these pressures around bureaucracy, inadequate funding and strict accountability, the teacher also has to answer to the politicians—“drive-by education experts”—who, along with seemingly gleeful reporters and TV

¹ “Project Voice” is a pseudonym, as are the names of all teachers, schools, districts and students that I mention. TFA is large enough that forgoing a pseudonym for it does not reveal the identity of the TFA teachers I interviewed.

camera crews, barge into her classroom to presume incompetence and to ask, “What are you doing wrong?”

The cartoonist wants the viewer to recognize these constraints on teachers, and his empathy lies with the teacher (not the politicians and media). He wants us to “side” with the teacher. However, this is not just a game between teachers and the outside “experts” intent on surveilling them. The cartoon also depicts students (or refers to them, since they are actually absent at their desks) who must be considered in the blame game, as well. Each student is literally labeled as a problem—“drugs,” “hungry,” “dadless,” and so on. In addition to highlighting things like underfunding and testing pressures, the cartoonist wants us to see what else the teacher has to “deal with”—problem-ridden students. The cartoonist invites us to consider that what is *really* unfair for teachers is the fact that they are teaching *these kids*.

So, who are these kids, and why do they have all these problems? *Do* they have these problems? Why is “dadless” situated as a problem, alongside things like being homeless and hungry? Does the teacher label her students as problems, or are they already constructed this way? How do the labels come to define students? Who or what is the root of the problems, and how does the teacher perceive her role in teaching these students? The cartoon can be interpreted in multiple ways and it raises interesting questions, but it struck me that in the same way these disembodied, deficient-filled students become the center of the cartoonist’s—and the teacher’s—concern, the talk of the urban teachers in my study also often centered on *urban students’ lack* as a major source of their daily struggles, even as teachers *also* recognized neoliberal pressures they faced around accountability and outcomes. That is, teachers were critical of testing and the lack of respect they themselves received from higher-ups and outsiders, but their critiques often wound their way back to blaming urban students and their families.

Granted, this cartoon classroom is not necessarily an urban classroom. Plenty of middle-class and white students use drugs, have uninvolved parents and watch a lot of TV, and many working class students and students of color do not. And granted, it is not that we should *not* be concerned with students who face abuse, hunger, and homelessness. But while we give suburban students the benefit of the doubt and assume they at least value education, even with any problems they *face*, the public discourse around urban education bemoans the supposed “declining values” of black, Latin@² and poor white students (Alonso, Anderson, Su, & Theoharis, 2009) and constructs urban students as *bearers* of problems. The cartoon seems to rely on this deficit construction of urban students. With each individual student desk labeled, the cartoon also hints that problems like hunger and homelessness are the fault of individual students and parents, rather than understanding poverty as part of a system of social inequalities. Mirroring this kind of (mis)understanding of students in poverty, the teachers I interviewed also sometimes blamed individual urban students and their families for the problems of their schools, and sidelined their critiques of the market-based reform measures that constrained their work.

Research Questions

This study traces teachers’ experiences with the blame game in two urban educational contexts: TFA and Project Voice. I examine how urban teachers in these two different settings negotiate neoliberal and deficit discourses to make meaning of their work in urban schools. I ask:

- How does the deficit belief that urban students are problems interweave with the current devaluation of teaching and other public work?
- How do these forces play out in different urban locales to shape teachers’ work and their perceptions of their work?

² I use “Latin@” (instead of Latino or Latina) to dislodge norms of masculinity within language and to disrupt gender/sex binaries (Bianca, 2012).

- How do urban teachers experience the blame and control that characterize urban schools?

These questions highlight the intricacies of teachers' everyday labor that are absent in the public discourse that views teachers as only scapegoats, while also taking seriously the harms of deficit thinking on urban students. One urban teacher in my study, Christine, said it was a "constant balance" to have the student relationships she wanted in the face of testing pressures and the school's emphasis on discipline and control. She "cringed" to hear how students talked about teachers in focus groups. Schools have been structured to keep teachers, traditionally women, at the bottom of the administration hierarchy, and teachers today still work under a top-down system where they have little input. Although Christine objected to the central role tests and test scores played in her teaching, and despite her awareness that students felt they were treated unfairly by strict discipline practices, she had little power to change school practices and culture. Understanding her own vulnerable position in the blame game, she had to encourage students to adhere to practices she herself opposed.

Beginning with a critical view of the deficit discourse's effects on students, this dissertation asks how, in conjunction with neoliberalism, the deficit discourse so available in urban schools might add to the blame and constraints urban teachers experience, and it asks how urban teachers struggle with and against these forces. In order to keep teachers' power relative to their students in the forefront, I approach teachers as "pivot" figures working within complex fields of power. Studying urban teachers means I neither study only "up" nor study only "down"; urban teachers are neither fully oppressors nor wholly victims. I examine how urban teachers at some moments use *strategies*—"ways of operating" afforded to those in power—to uphold deficit discourse (de Certeau, 1984, pp. 30-36), and at other moments use *tactics*—the "art of the

weak” (p. 37)—to creatively “make use of the cracks” in deficit discourse, and to take the “order by surprise” (p. 37).

Studying the “Known” and Making the Familiar Unfamiliar: Teachers and the Urban

“All that was taken-for-granted was to be made sociologically strange” (Pfohl, 1992, p. 25).

What does it mean to study teachers and their work, and what does it mean to study urban education? I contend that it is important to understand how both teaching and “the Urban” are simultaneously known and unknown. That is, they are both concepts that are always already *socially constructed* in particular ways. These constructs—while amendable to re-construction—are reproduced and maintained as they circulate through public discourse; the teacher and the urban are made intelligible through shared meanings, language, social practices and policy. While I discuss literature on neoliberal and deficit discourses in more detail in the next chapter, in the following sections I want to briefly introduce these concepts and argue that these particular discourses are central to what and how we “know” about teachers and teaching, as well as to what and how we “know” about urban spaces, urban schools, and urban youth and families. By *discourse*, I mean a kind of power that circulates to produce knowledge and seeming “truths.” Discourse refers to a set of practices and ways of thinking and talking about a particular object that actually define or *constitute* the object:

Discourse, Foucault argues, constructs the topic. It defines and produces the objects of our knowledge. It governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others. (Hall, 2003, p. 44)

Thus, analyzing discourse is not only a linguistic matter but a material one. Because discourse is so foundational in constituting our reality and making it intelligible, it is often hard to detect

particular discourses and talk about them. But naming particular discourses and recognizing how these discourses shape urban teachers' work is important because it allows me to uncover the taken-for-granted assumptions about teaching in urban schools, to consider how teachers' work might be constituted *otherwise*, and to examine how individual teachers take up or actually resist dominant discourse.

“Impossibly Familiar” Teachers

“Teachers are figures of such impossible familiarity that they are apt to vanish beneath the general and the particular disparagements such taken-for-granted phenomena may attract to themselves” (Miller, 1995, p. xi).

Teachers and the business of teaching are hypervisible as well as invisible. Most of us have spent a good amount of time in schools as students and ostensibly know the job of teaching. While it is true that “the mass experience of compulsory education has made teaching one of the most socially familiar professions in the United States” (Britzman, 1986, p. 443), we also do not know everything about the complexities of teachers' work. Representations of teachers in media and other popular culture texts add to our own memories of teachers to further construct the teacher as a “known” figure in the public's imagination (Biklen, 1995; Weber & Mitchell, 1995).

We think teachers have it easy because they can close their classroom door, and we see them as autonomous. While teachers are dominant in relation to students' position, they are not so powerful in many ways. However, students see their teachers—and past students might remember their teachers—as powerful individuals:

[I]n the eyes of students, the teacher's place in this hierarchy is often obscured by her/his seemingly autonomous classroom presence. Since students are segregated from the behind-the-scenes world of teachers and administrators and have no power to effect

organizational change, they often reduce school hierarchy to that of classroom life. To students, school hierarchy looks more like a teachers' personal decision than a structural feature of the school. (Britzman, 1986, pp. 444-445).

Many of us tend to understand teachers as the ones singularly responsible for what goes on in schools. Kumashiro (2012) writes about how we reduce the politics of schooling to the obvious players—the parties that we can see. Namely, education seemingly becomes “*what happens between teachers, students, and parents,*” while funding and other systemic issues fade to the back of our conceptions of schooling (p. 18).

This assumed familiarity and taken-for-granted knowledge helps teaching and teachers to be a target, to be something *up for critique*. In this era of neoliberalism, educators are under increasing pressure to submit to accountability measures. These measures seek to isolate teachers and students from one another and to evaluate individual impact and outcomes, atomized from the inherently social nature of teaching and learning. Neoliberal logic or discourse makes economic concerns paramount and insists that privatization, competition, personal “choice” and an individual-as-entrepreneur subjectivities are needed in all realms of social life—not just the business or accounting world (Davies & Bansel, 2007; Peters, 2001). Collective power, the Public, and social welfare services are reconstituted as unnecessary. I describe neoliberalism more fully in Chapter Two and discuss how the teachers in my study navigated neoliberal pressures in Chapter Five, but this emergent neoliberal discourse, in conjunction with the seemingly “known” profession of teaching, helps to produce public school teachers as people up for surveillance and scorn.

Racist, Classist Discourses: Deficit Thinking in Urban Education

Similarly to teachers and teaching, the Urban is “known” but also unknown. Urban or “inner-city” spaces are known even to people who do not live or work in these spaces because the Urban is also a *cultural* space that exists in our shared social understandings, as well as in physical reality. The social construction of the Urban allows those outside of urban spaces to “know” it. It also constructs the lived realities and perspectives of those within urban spaces and becomes something with which they must contend.

While I discuss deficit discourse throughout the dissertation, here I introduce this concept and discuss how deficit discourse helps construct the Urban in our minds and in material practice. The deficit discourse is a racialized frame that constructs poor urban students and students of color as lacking, that blames urban students and their communities for the state of their schools, that ignores students as resources, and that often results in excessive attempts to discipline and control students. Scholars have described the multiple damages that the deficit discourse causes urban students (Alonso et al., 2009; Delpit, 1995; García & Guerra, 2004; Valencia, 1997; 2010), and I observed its power in teachers’ talk and in the practices of urban schools where I worked with students and teachers on Project Voice. It exposed itself in the kindergarten student hanging out of his classroom doorway, telling us as visitors or outsiders, “Do you know? It’s like a prison here.” It is the students who must walk silently down the hall with their arms outstretched and fingers touching the wall to keep a perfectly straight line, lest they become “out of control.” It is the teachers talking about their school being doomed because the “good families” have moved out. Again, discourse involves linguistic as well as non-linguistic practices.

While I mostly consider how deficit discourse operates *within* schools and how urban teachers navigate this discourse, this kind of discourse, of course, also permeates broader society. It helps us to “know” what poor people are like or “know” what young people of color value, and it helps to keep racist and classist systems intact. Legal and race scholar Michelle Alexander (2013), on the day George Zimmerman was acquitted of murdering 17-year-old Trayvon Martin, captured this kind of discourse when she wrote about the racist social “mindset” that must be held responsible for Martin’s death, in addition to Zimmerman the individual, in a Facebook status update:

If Trayvon Martin had been born white he would be alive today. That has been established beyond all reasonable doubt. If he had been white, he never would have been stalked by Zimmerman, there would have been no fight, no funeral, no trial, no verdict. It is the Zimmerman mindset that must be found guilty - far more than the man himself. It is a mindset that views black men and boys as nothing but a threat, good for nothing, up to no good no matter who they are or what they are doing. It is the Zimmerman mindset that has birthed a penal system unprecedented in world history, and relegated millions to a permanent undercaste. Trayvon, you will not be forgotten. We will honor you - and the millions your memory represents - by building a movement that makes America what it must become. RIP (Alexander, 2013)

While Alexander uses the word mindset instead of discourse, she gets at the knowledge/power dynamic that constructs men of color like Martin, both in our minds and in our institutions and social practices, and that has destructive—in this case, deadly—effects. As I complete this dissertation, the killing of another young black man, Michael Brown—this time by a white cop—has made headlines. Again, while some want to say this was an individual act by one “bad apple”

police officer, an understanding of deficit discourse and racist social constructions demands that we read this act as part of a larger racialized “criminalization [that] *stalks*” youth of color (Blow, 2014, my emphasis).

Understanding dominant discourses, and their underlying racist, classist ideologies, is helpful in understanding how oppression works in this era of “color-blind” racism with seemingly few racists—few people who take ownership of consciously racist attitudes or practices (Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Leonardo, 2013; Omi & Winant, 1994; Applebaum, 2010). Circulating race-“blind” discourses allow individuals to talk about race in a veiled manner, and to carry out racist practices without having to name them as such. Omi and Winant (1994) point out that starting in the 1960s, it became in bad taste to be outwardly racist and that “racial equality had to be acknowledged as a desirable goal” (p. 117). In urban education, deficit discourse provides people a way to maintain racist ideas about students of color without exposing that racism. The term “urban” itself carries negative, “known,” socially-constructed baggage and is often a coded way to talk about race (as well as class). As Watson (2011) found, educators often divide students into two groups—“urban and normal,” with “urban” referring to black and Latin@ students and meaning “*less than*.” Through the shared meanings of deficit discourse and the conventions of color-blind ideology, a teacher in Watson’s study could say that urban students “can’t see the value of education” without fear of being called out on her racism while, simultaneously, allowing the racist meaning to come through loud and clear.

Theoretical Underpinnings: Teacher Experience and Identity, Discourse, and Negotiation

While the Cultural Foundations of Education Department has added to and sharpened many of the tools in my “theory toolbox” (Nealon & Giroux, 2003), women’s studies is the place where I first started gaining some traction in theory, as well as methodology. Women’s studies

taught me to value and trust experiences of women—especially non-Western women, women of color, non-Christian women, lesbian women, poor and working class women. These women’s experiences are marginalized in a patriarchal, racist, classist, heteronormative society. Listening to them as experts on their own lives and centering their experiences often necessarily disrupts conventional “facts” about social reality and reveals new knowledge.

However, as I also first learned in women’s studies, experience is never transparent. As my professor Lisa Hogeland provocatively said in a feminist theory seminar, “Your experience can lie to you.” Dr. Hogeland was talking both about privilege—which may limit and distort one’s knowledge of social reality—and about the power of dominant discourse to train our interpretations of our experiences to fit within existing, commonsense and often oppressive narratives. This tension of experience yielding knowledge but in not-so-obvious ways has stayed with me and informs this dissertation. I find it important to examine how experience is interpreted and how it functions to support or interrupt dominant discourse and dominant frames. In this study, teachers’ experiences in school—whether they talked about their memories of being a student or they discussed a teaching experience they had had just a few days prior—were *vital* to understanding their perspectives and simultaneously *insufficient*. The frames through which teachers interpreted and represented their experiences, and the frames through which I also heard their stories, meant just as much as the stories themselves. For example, in Chapter Four I demonstrate that teachers’ “personal school talk” (talk that was about a teacher’s own experiences as a student in school) served to shape their perspective that urban schools—or urban students, families, teachers—get schooling wrong. However, sometimes teachers used their personal school experiences as a way to *interrupt* deficit understandings of urban students and schools. TFA alum Kelly, for instance, used her own (non-urban) schooling experience as

the grounds to both uphold *and* critique arguably similar, controlling practices in urban schools. I am interested in teachers' experiences in and of themselves, but I also am interested in asking questions about how experience *functions*, how it is *interpreted*, and *whose counts*, especially because of the authority routinely given to first-hand experience.

In the following sections, I pull out threads from feminist and poststructuralist debates that have helped me to keep in tension the idea that experience allows for knowledge but in non-transparent ways, and that have, specifically, helped to shape my thinking about public school teachers, their complicated positions with power relations, their experiences in urban schools, and the broader discourses that they maneuver. I start by describing contributions of feminist standpoint theories and the theory of intersectionality, before discussing insights from poststructural/postmodern theorists. While many of the scholars write about *women* and *women's experiences* (and many also problematize these terms), I conclude this discussion by applying these theories to thinking about urban teachers—their identities and experiences, and the discourses that construct urban school life.

Standpoint Theories, Identity Politics, and Intersectionality

Feminist standpoint theory contends that knowledge is partial and socially situated, and that starting with the lives, experiences, situations, identities, and/or standpoint of women allows for a different and perhaps less distorted view of the world (e.g., Collins, 1990, 2004; Combahee River Collective, 2004; Harding, 2004b, 2004c; Heckman, 2004b; Hirschmann, 2004; Smith 1987). Despite claims from scientists and other knowledge producers that the knowledge they deliver has been neutral or universal, standpoint theorists disrupt the modern contention of neutral or universal knowledge by revealing it as dominant, masculine, white knowledge. They

claim that because women have been subjugated, their experience as women serves as grounds or starting points for other sets of knowledge.

Standpoint theories and theorists can differ greatly, as the chapters in Harding's (2004b) edited volume dedicated to feminist standpoint theory showcase (Collins, 2004; Harding, 2004a; Heckman, 2004a, 2004b; Smith, 2004). It can be tricky to describe standpoint theories generally, let alone their take on the role of experience and identity.

Some feminist standpoint theorists have focused primarily on the gendered aspect of identity, on the female subject, on "women's experiences." Smith (1987) argues that women are left out of meaning-making apparatuses:

...[W]omen have been deprived of the means to participate in creating forms of thought relevant or adequate to express their own experience or to define and raise social consciousness about their situation and concerns. They have never controlled the material or social means to the making of a tradition among themselves or to acting as equals in the ongoing discourse of intellectuals. (Smith, 1987, p. 18)

Women are excluded from powerful positions within the social, so women's experiences can end up not corresponding with the frameworks society produces, and we feel a disagreement between what we experience and how we are able to think and talk about those experiences: "It means that our experience has not been represented in the making of our culture. There is a gap between where we are and the means we have to express and act" (p. 19). Smith argues that it is not a neutral culture that gets produced when men are in positions of power and women are left outside the inner circle, but that the men's "one-sided standpoint comes to be seen as natural, obvious and general" (p. 20). Smith and other standpoint theorists offer insights for the study of teachers—themselves feminized workers in an undervalued, feminized profession. Teachers'

voices, as I discuss in the next two chapters, are also excluded. There is often, like Smith says, a “gap” between teachers’ own experiences and the larger narratives of teaching and work.

But when Smith advocates for “beginning from our experience and from our own subjectivities” (p. 59), who exactly constitutes the “our”—*which* women are we imagining as making up a women’s standpoint? Smith is concerned about the “conceptual hegemony” that, within some Marxist theory, reduces women’s experiences and relegates them “between or outside the institutional spheres” (pp.68-69). But she does not seem as attentive to the kinds of conceptual hegemony that can occur *within* “women.” She does say finally say that “women’s experience” is complicated and not an automatically easy starting point: “Women are variously located in society. Their situations are much more various than the topics we recognize somewhat stereotypically as women’s topics would suggest” (p. 85).

However, after acknowledging heterogeneity within “women,” Smith follows with, “That is not the issue” (p. 86). She writes that, “At this point the concern is to develop a method of working in sociology that will make it possible to begin from where women in general are, doing the type of work with which we are as a sex identified” (p. 86). Thus, Smith seems to assume that there is something “general” about women, and she believes that whatever is not general about women can be dealt with at a later time. Not surprisingly, if we look at the experiences of “women in general,” we end up talking about the experiences and concerns of white, western, middle-class, straight women. When we make the complaint that “women’s experience” has been left out, “the complaint does not specify which women have been silenced...” (Lugones & Spelman, 1986, p. 20). Lugones and Spelman write that

the women’s voices most likely to come forth and the women’s voices most likely to be heard are, in the United States anyway, those of white, middle-class, heterosexual

Christian (or anyway not self-identified non-Christian) women. Indeed, many Hispanas, Black women, Jewish women—to name a few groups—have felt it an invitation to silence rather than speech to be requested—if they are requested at all—to speak about being “women” (with the plain wrapper—as if there were one) in distinction from speaking about being Hispana, Black, Jewish, working-class, etc., women. (p. 21).

In trying to take out race, for instance, to talk only about “women’s experience,” whiteness and “white experience” end up staying attached to women, while only “black experience” is conceived of the race issue that needs to be bracketed and discussed later: “Feminist essentialists find that in removing issues of ‘race’ they have actually only managed to remove black women—meaning that white women now stand as the epitome of Woman” (Harris, 1990, p. 592).

Thus, some standpoint theories have been criticized for being essentialist. Harris (1990) defines essentialism in terms of its monolithic functionings:

The notion that there is a monolithic “women’s experience” that can be described independent of other facets of experience like, race, class, and sexual orientations is one I refer to in this essay as “gender essentialism.” A corollary to gender essentialism is “racial essentialism”—the belief that there is a monolithic “Black Experience,” or “Chicano Experience.” (p. 588)

Even if we accept that there is no natural or inherent or born *essence* to being a woman or to being black or Chicano, even in *talking* about being a woman or being black or being Chicano, we are still generalizing and drawing together a lot of various experiences under one stable term. To talk about “women” is to attempt to talk about a group of people as only gendered; it is an attempt to talk about race-less, class-less, religion-less (and so on –less) “women.” Predictably,

all of the various women and women's experiences cannot be captured under the singular concept "woman"—nor under the equally singular concept, even if pluralized, "women" (Fuss, 1989, p. 4).

Collins (1990) and other standpoint theorists have developed a more complex female subject and have called for an *intersectional* approach to identity. A theory of intersectionality is helpful in remembering that while the teachers in my study are all "urban teachers" and share some of the same experiences, they are also positioned differently by gender, race, class and ethnicity. As such, they do not negotiate neoliberal, deficit and other discourses uniformly. Collins argues that it is a fiction that women can be understood only *as women*; singling out one system of oppression at a time is impossible for women of color because of the "simultaneity" and intersectionality of oppressions (p. 221). The Combahee River Collective (2004)—which Moya (2000) says is "the locus classicus of identity politics" (p. 2)—also found that "the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives" (Combahee Rive Collective, 2004, p. 33). Because women of color experience "interlocking systems of oppression," and are acutely aware of their status as both woman and non-white, they cannot talk about these oppressions in a disjointed, additive ways (Collins, 1990, p. 222). White women, of course, are also not *only* women, but their/our white privilege allows them/us to be concerned with only the gendered part of their/our identity, and this privilege allows them/us to define their/our particular experiences as the experiences of "universal women."³ hooks (1994) points out that essentialism can be expressed by those who inhabit locations of privilege and dominance. While she is critical of identity politics and essentialism,

³ Here I use a "guilty footnote" (Harris, 1990, p. 603) to explain my uses of "we" or "they" in discussing "women" or "white women." I do not mean to say I am not part of the group "white women" because I certainly am. But I work to recognize my racial privilege and to police myself from thinking of myself as "universal woman." Any use of "we" or "they" is probably always overly simplistic and potentially dangerous, but this difficulty in language is precisely, I think, reflective of how entrenched categorization is and how difficult it is to not essentialize.

hooks is “suspicious when theories call this practice harmful as a way of suggesting that it is a strategy only marginalized groups employ” (p. 82).

One piece of feminist standpoint theory that is especially important for my work on teachers is the idea that a standpoint is not automatic, but *achieved*. Collins (2004), Harding (2004c), Haraway (2004) and others remind us that a standpoint does not flow directly or automatically from a subjugated group, and the standpoint of the “most” oppressed does not guarantee the best knowledge:

It cannot be overemphasized that the epistemic privilege oppressed groups possess is by no means automatic. The “moment of critical insight” is one that comes only through political struggle, for it is blocked and its understandings obscured by the dominant, hegemonous ideologies and the practices that they make appear normal and even natural.

(Harding, 2004b, p. 9)

Yes, we can demonstrate that teachers and their work are marginalized, but teachers achieve insight and knowledge through *struggle* against that marginalization—not automatically through simply being teachers.

Feminist Poststructuralism and Postmodernism

Like standpoint theory, poststructuralism and postmodernism understand knowledge as partial and socially situated. These theories critique universal truths, metanarratives, or grand stories that explain all.⁴ Because of this, both theories have been critiqued for appearing to embrace relativism: “Standpoint theory, along with postmodernist and some postcolonial approaches, can seem to share this debilitating relativism because it, too, acknowledges that all

⁴ I use postmodernism and poststructuralism almost interchangeably, which is not ideal. However, many other writers seem to do the same. Satya Mohanty (2000) considers postmodernist thought as deriving mostly from poststructuralism (p. 5). Postmodernism can refer to a time period or an aesthetic tradition, but I use it as a theory that critiques universalism, a stable subject, and language as only representational. I define postmodernism/poststructuralism further in the second paragraph of this section.

knowledge claims are socially situated” (Harding, 2004b, p. 11). However, standpoint theory specifically argues “against the idea that all social situations provide equally useful resources for learning about the world and against the idea that they all set equally strong limits on knowledge” (Harding, 2004c, p. 131).

Standpoint theory is sometimes written off as a bit essentialist and too reliant on these coherent selves that “have” experiences, and thus, somehow, automatic knowledge. Carefully revisiting the work of at least some standpoint theorists, however, made me recognize that they do attend to issues of power and they do scrutinize the subject—both of which are things I find appealing about poststructuralism and postmodernism. However, while some standpoint theorists may aim to analyze the subject of knowledge, feminist poststructuralists and postmodernists are even more skeptical of the stable subject or identity. They do not believe that the self, or the meaning of a self’s experience, is self-evident. They are interested in discourse, in language as productive as well as representational, and in subjectivity as an *effect* of or produced by discourse (e.g., Applebaum, 2010; Butler, 1990; 1995a; 1995b; Flax, 1992; Foucault, 1979; Sawicki, 1994, 1996). The subject is not merely socially situated, but it is *constituted* through discourse. So, while poststructural theorists join with standpoint theorists to highlight the situatedness of knowledge and to critique modernity’s normative claims, standpoint theorists and some other feminist scholars have worried that poststructuralism attacks the very notion on which they base their critique of masculine dominance: the female subject and her daily experiences.

Postmodernists and poststructuralists are part of a wave of scholarship that sees language and discourse as active, as productive. They argue, “Language does things” (Applebaum, 2010, p. 94): “[L]anguage or utterances are related to large social patterns of power and the ways in

which language may do things *through* us without our knowledge or consent.... Focusing on the intentions of the speaker can *actually hide* how power works through discourse” (p. 94). As Flax (1992) puts it, “Language speaks us as much as we speak it” (p. 453). Thinking about how urban teachers and their perspectives are produced by discourse means understanding that sometimes their good intentions were trumped by the negative effects of deficit discourse. Sometimes their desire to raise test scores and compete with other teachers were not desires of their own making but were shaped by neoliberal discourse.

Foucault (1979) argues that the subject—the idea of a stable, agentive self—is itself produced by power: “Discipline ‘makes’ individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise. It is not a triumphant power, which because of its own excess can pride itself on its omnipotence; it is a modest, suspicious power which functions as a calculated, but permanent economy” (Foucault, 1979, p. 170). Foucault is not as interested in obvious and repressive power, a power that is “triumphant” over us. Rather, he focuses on how power works subtly through us to constitute us. Instead of a pre-discursive, pre-power self as the stable starting point that *then* engages in politics, has experience, and uses language to describe or reflect objects of the world, poststructuralism flips this commonsensical formation on its head: politics and discourse produce the subject.

Scott (1992) argues that *experience*, like identity, is discursive: “It is to refuse a separation between ‘experience’ and language and to insist instead on the productive quality of discourse” (p. 34). Scott and others approach experience critically not to condemn it or give up on the idea that experience can yield knowledge, but they remain very attentive to “the ways in which politics organize and interpret experience” (p. 31), precisely so experience can remain in play as a possible site for knowledge production. Although our experience is complicated and

not self-evident, we often talk about and think about our experience as very self-evident, as a way to prove something: “When the evidence offered is the evidence of ‘experience,’ the claim for referentiality is further buttressed—what could be truer, after all, than a subject’s own account of what he or she has lived through?” (p. 24). Thus, experience not only connotes truth, but a rather favorable way of getting at the truth: “The notion of experience as subjective witness, writes Williams, ‘is offered not only as truth, but as the most authentic kind of truth,’ as ‘the ground for all (subsequent) reasoning and analysis’” (Scott, 1992, p. 27, quoting Williams). Experience conceived in this way resists questioning—there is no room to ask about whose experience matters, for instance—so I strive to center the experiences of teachers while always asking what discourses inform those experiences.

Teachers’ Experiences with “The Urban”

“The point I would like to underscore here is that a frame [emphasis added] for understanding violence emerges in tandem with the experience, and that the frame works both to preclude certain kinds of questions, certain kinds of historical inquiries, and to function as a moral justification for retaliation. It seems crucial to attend to this frame, since it decides, in a forceful way, what we can hear, whether a view will be taken as explanation or as exoneration, whether we can hear the difference, and abide by it” (Butler, 2002, p. 179).

The threads I have pulled out in these debates on experience, knowledge and identity help to frame my study on how urban teachers talk about their experiences in urban schools. In this section, I further discuss my interest in urban teachers’ experiences—how their experience is constructed, interpreted, and how it gets understood through dominant frames and discourses, across borders, and across unequal fields of power. I am especially interested in how teachers understand their experiences as *expeditionary* experiences, as experiences of “the Other,”

experiences of the “exotic”, and how *both* dominant discourses about the Other—racist discourses, deficit discourses, urban discourses, colonizing discourses, etc.—*and* “the authority of experience” (itself a dominant frame) can potentially combine to create these experiences as something super congealed and powerful.

Satya Mohanty (2000) believes that the postmodern concern with experience is misplaced; he permits postmodernists to be suspicious, in general, but says they mistakenly think there is a unique problem with experience:

Postmodernists typically warn against the desire to consider experience a foundation of other social meanings; they point out that personal experiences are basically rather unstable or slippery, and since they can only be interpreted in terms of linguistic or other signs, they must be heir to all the exegetical and interpretive problems that accompany social signification. (pp. 30-31)

Mohanty thinks this worry over experience “can be best appreciated as part of the more general suspicion of foundationalism in contemporary thought, for there is nothing peculiar to experience as such which warrants its rejection on epistemological grounds” (p. 31). However, I would disagree and argue there is something peculiar to experience: The authority of experience is prevalent! Without quoting Scott (1992) at too great a length, she writes beautifully here about how the authority of experience works in such a congealed, taken-for-granted way:

The evidence of experience works as a foundation providing both a starting point and a conclusive kind of explanation, beyond which few questions need to or can be asked. And yet it is precisely the questions precluded—questions about discourse, difference, and subjectivity, as well as about what counts as experience and who gets to make that

determination—that would enable us to historicize experience, to reflect critically on the history we write about it, rather than to premise our history upon it. (pp. 32-33)

The evidence of experience is so naturalized and normalized that, indeed, it is difficult to disrupt it and ask questions about it. The authority of experience, then, seems to be a powerful discourse itself.

How, then, do I make sense of teachers' personal experiences in urban schools?

Recognizing that teachers are often marginalized and not taken seriously, how do I honor and hear their experience, while also understanding that many of the teachers in my study are privileged in relation to their students, and while recognizing that dominant discourses are already at work constructing the Urban and teachers' experiences of urban schools? When a dominantly positioned person has a personal *experience* of or with the Other, and the Other is already constituted and “understood” or “known” through dominant, oppressive frames, this experience will hold weight with and be easily understood by others who hear about it. For example, Narayan (1997) is concerned how “culture is invoked” to explain cross-cultural happenings. For a Westerner to understand something like dowry-murders in India, “culture” is summoned in order to explain it, although “both sati and dowry-murders were to a large degree unexplained even after this ‘explanation,’ remaining fairly mysterious and arbitrary practices that seemed to “happen” to Indian women as a result of “Indian culture” (p. 85). She further suggests that a phenomenon's “other” status is what causes it to cross borders and become a phenomenon up for “explanation,” in the first place (pp. 100-101). I am concerned with how the racialized deficit discourse and other oppressive discourses of “the Urban” are similarly called upon to interpret experiences in urban schools, as such tales of urban experiences *as Other* seem to cross

borders frequently.⁵ This kind of “explanation” or understanding, Babbitt (2001) argues, closes off the need for any further understanding: “Worse than being misunderstood...is to be understood in a way that disallows recognition that there is something that still needs to be understood” (p. 303). In both these cases, dominant discourses about Indian Culture and the Urban combine with the (perhaps equally) dominant discourse or technology of experiential authority to form a commonsensical “understanding.”

I examine how the urban teachers in my study often positioned themselves as *outsiders* to urban schools, and I consider how they entered into urban schools with certain assumptions and expectations—a kind of “knowledge” or “understanding”—of those schools and the children who attend them, as well as of the other educators who work in them. I am attentive to how urban teachers understood their roles within urban education—what they wanted to achieve with urban students and how they characterized their interactions with poor students and students of color. I believe that these teachers often had good intentions, and many seemed reflective of their experiences in urban schools, but their expectations and experiences were also shot through with circulating discourses of race and class that served to maintain the construct of urban students as *problems*, as *Other*.

Outline of the Chapters

Chapter Two of my dissertation includes a review of the literature on neoliberalism and how it functions in education, as well as literature on deficit discourse and its effects on urban education and urban students. I also discuss the harmful effects of deficit discourse on teachers and consider how urban teachers must navigate both neoliberal and deficit logics.

⁵ Narayan’s discussion focuses on national border crossings, but she notes that border crossings happen within one nation, as well. She mentions how the “cultural explanation” happens to communities of color in the U.S. and not white communities, for instance (pp. 87-88).

In Chapter Three, I describe my research methodology. I discuss my research design, the “sites” I chose to examine (TFA and Project Voice), and the methods I chose to use in collecting and analyzing data. In this chapter, I also introduce the study’s participants, introduce the concept of “teacher voice,” examine my subjectivity and the power dynamics between myself and the research participants, and discuss some limitations of the study.

In Chapter Four, I delve into the data on teachers’ negotiations with deficit discourse. I discuss how urban teachers routinely constructed their students and students’ families *as lack*, and I tease apart teacher talk that understood deficiencies as intrinsic in urban students and talk that recognized a structural or social source of a student’s apparent lack, and that was not seemingly rooted in deficit discourse. In addition to discussing how teachers navigated the deficit discourse in understanding students and their parents, I also consider how the developmental model intersects with deficit thinking, as well as how urban teachers’ own educational experiences acted as a contrast to what they experienced in the urban schools where they worked.

Chapter Five explores how urban teachers struggled for control over their work. I examine the particular constraints they faced, particularly those constraints that are effects of neoliberalism, and I consider teachers’ critiques of their working conditions as a kind of agency. Specifically, I discuss how teachers perceived “other teachers” as well as limited time and pressures of “efficiency” as major constraints, and I consider how neoliberalism both shaped their critiques and played a role in determining what was up for critique in the first place. I argue that teachers’ critical talk opened up possibilities for school to be understood and done differently, but because of the way neoliberal and deficit logics intertwined, teachers often started with a critique of, for example, the overemphasis on efficiency or measuring accountability only to end up blaming urban students, reproducing them as problems.

In Chapter Six, I examine the instances when teachers seemed able to interrupt deficit discourse. I consider how some urban teachers' relationships with students offered them glimpses of *knowing* students—a kind of “knowing” that was not informed by deficit thinking. To have the kind of relationship with students that could disrupt not only deficit discourse but that also might disturb the traditional adult-child hierarchy, teachers seemed to need access to alternative frameworks or models that directly opposed deficit discourse, and/or they needed some way of taking students seriously.

The final chapter summarizes the study's findings. I also discuss the implications of the study in the areas of teacher knowledge, teacher unions, and teacher turnover. I end with a discussion on potential “next steps” in this line of research.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

This dissertation examines some of the complexities of urban teachers' work and seeks to understand teachers' position within the powerful discourses that construct their work lives. Because I started this study concerned about the effects of neoliberal approaches to education as well as the racialized deficit discourse, and because my research investigated how urban teachers navigated these discourses in their talk, often simultaneously, this literature review examines scholarship on both neoliberalism and deficit thinking within urban education. I discuss both of these fields separately, and I also find some points where these two forces intersect to shape the work of urban teachers, and to shape our ideas of "the Urban," urban students, and urban teachers themselves. I first define neoliberalism and discuss its impact in education, including discussions on a culture of testing and TFA. Within this discussion, I also briefly trace the history of public education in the U.S. to better situate the current period of reform. I then describe what I mean by the "deficit discourse" and demonstrate how it harms urban students, before going on to discuss how both the deficit discourse and neoliberalism shape urban teachers' work.

Neoliberalism

"[I]f markets do not exist (in areas such as land, water, education, health care, social security, or environmental pollution) then they must be created, by state action if necessary" (Harvey, 2005, p. 2).

Neoliberalism refers to the set of ideas and practices that make the market paramount. Under neoliberalism, the world is seen in exclusively economic terms, and individuals are understood as "human capital," "entrepreneur," "labor power" or "consumer." Neoliberalism is

usually opposed to collectivism and favors “personal freedom and possessive individualism” (Robertson, 2008, p. 13). Neoliberalism is a term that has been used increasingly in the academy, but not as much in U.S. popular discourse. “Neoconservatism” or “market-based policies” are the terms we are more likely to hear (Ong, 2006). The guiding neoliberal (or neoconservative) belief is that “human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (Harvey, 2005, p. 2). Government becomes Big Government and is understood as an over-regulating intrusion into individuals’ quests for “freedom” and “flexibility.” While in traditional liberalism the role of the state is small or nonexistent, neoliberalism actually does require some state involvement

to ensure that Adam Smith’s hidden hand of the market can function. This means that in contrast to liberalism, neoliberalism demands that freedom of the market, the right to free trade, the right to choose and protection of private property be assured by the state.

(Robertson, 2008, p. 13)

Thus, rather than the state being the sole granter of sovereignty, the state becomes an *agent* or tool of the market; the state helps make an appropriate market (Apple, 2005; Compton & Weiner, 2008; Harvey, 2005; Ong, 2006).

While neoliberalism promises freedom, choice, and self-determination under the rules of the market, the result seems to be less freedom and fewer rights for most of us. Harvey (2005) argues that neoliberalism has restored the concentration of wealth to a small capitalist class, giving “rights and freedoms on those ‘whose income, leisure and security need no enhancing’, leaving a pittance for the rest of us” (p. 37, using Polanyi). He suggests that invoking the common sense ideology of personal freedom is what has allowed neoliberalism to take hold,

despite the harm it causes to most people. Compton and Weiner (2008) point out that neoliberalism's "hijacking of ideals and terms" (p. 6) distorts and narrows the concept of freedom to mean only "free enterprise" within the market, for instance. This hijacking limits the possibilities for thinking about government as *protecting* individuals' freedom (rather than intruding upon it), or for thinking about unions as guarding *against* worker fatigue (rather than limiting the worker's "freedom" to be endlessly "flexible" for the corporation).

But how do we get from an individual who is "free" from state intrusions to one who is beholden to the market? What is the link that makes neoliberalism (at least rhetorically) about freedom, but that results in the "audit culture" conditions of evaluation and measurement, that are also said to be features of neoliberalism (Apple, 2005)? Apple (2005) says that in an "age of universal welfare, the perceived possibilities of slothful indolence create necessities for new forms of vigilance, surveillance, 'performance appraisal' and of forms of control generally....The state will see to it that each one makes a 'continual enterprise of ourselves'" (Apple, 2005, p. 14, citing Olssen, 1996). We are allowed to be self-interested entrepreneurs, as long as we prove we are being so: "Neo-liberalism requires the constant production of evidence that you are doing things 'efficiently' and in the 'correct' way" (p. 14).

Under this "rigorous and unforgiving ideology of individual accountability" (Apple, 2005, p. 15), the Public Good is bad, and everything private is good. "While personal and individual freedom in the marketplace is guaranteed, each individual is held responsible and accountable for his or her own actions and well-being" (Harvey, 2005, p. 65), thus, eliminating social programs seemingly begins to make sense. If we are all free, flexible entrepreneurs in the market, we should not need any public services to "bind" us:

Individual success or failure are interpreted in terms of entrepreneurial virtues or personal failings (such as not investing significantly enough in one's own human capital through education) rather than being attributed to any systemic property (such as the class exclusions usually attributed to capitalism). (Harvey, 2005, pp. 65-66)

While neoliberalism seems primarily economic with its focus on free markets, it must be understood for its political effects. Neoliberalism is “a political project of governing and persuasion intent on producing new forms of subjectivity and particular modes of conduct” (Giroux, 2008, p. 1). Neoliberalism produces new subjectivities who are self-regulating, and who in turn must consent to neoliberal policies: “People who received these things from the state must be convinced to want to buy them” (Apple, 2005, p. 12). In making the state and subjects into its agents, Ong (2006) also argues that neoliberalism is a form of *governing* in its own right—a redefining of citizenship, or a way of reorganizing space and populations: “Things that used to be fused together—identity, entitlement, territoriality, and nationality—are being taken apart and realigned in innovative relationships and spaces by neoliberal technologies and sovereign exceptions” (p. 27). (For example, instead of citizenship rights being determined by the state and territory where someone lives, a global corporation could work with the government to set up a special labor zone *within* the state, where poor citizen workers are subject to different rules and regulations than the non-citizen corporation.) Different populations are produced to receive different levels of discipline and care, and the granting of rights to different populations is a function of how valuable they are to the economy rather than a function of traditional citizenship (Ong, p. 79).

Neoliberalism in Education

“It is significant to note that through the hegemonic process of standardized testing, teachers, as workers, have become the new scapegoat of the system. As a result of the political struggles in education rooted in the civil rights era, it became unfashionable to blame students, their parents, or their culture. Teachers, whose status is located at the next lowest rung of the educational hierarchy, became the most likely suspects” (Darder, 2005, p. 214).

A thorough discussion of how neoliberalism matters for education could include many different yet related concerns: Schools become markets (Robertson, 2008; Valencia, 2010); education becomes a way to secure global economic domination for U.S. corporations (Hursh, 2007); a devaluing or looting of the public translates into more private schools and educational management organizations (EMOs) (Saltman, 2007); competition translated to education means charters, choice, and vouchers (Kumashiro, 2012); those students who cannot compete adequately fall into another expanding market—the prison-industrial complex (Fine & Ruglis, 2009; Raible & Irizarry, 2010); what is considered valuable knowledge is narrowed to the demands of the market (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006; Darder, 2005; Giroux, 2008); managerialism and other business practices will enter as solutions (Thrupp, 2009); teachers and students must be hyper-surveilled through auditing; teachers do not need pedagogical theory and practice if they are only transmitting content knowledge for tests, so schools of education become obsolete (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006); teachers unions are deemed unnecessary because they protect bad teachers, while business principles of motivation, sanctions and rewards will secure the good teachers (Ravitch, 2010; Sirotnik, 2004); rich, business-led foundations begin directing educational policy (Miner, 2010; Saltman, 2009); and so on...

Considering all of these topics is beyond the scope of this dissertation. For this study, I focus my attention mostly on literature that discusses the constraining effects of neoliberal logics and practices for teachers and their work. Particularly, I am interested in how neoliberalism has made teachers objects of an “audit culture” (Apple, 2005), primarily through high-stakes testing. High-stakes testing is the central mechanism of the standards and accountability era, the period starting with the *A Nation at Risk* report (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) and continuing into the present with the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) (United States Department of Education, 2002), and President Obama and Secretary Duncan’s “Race to the Top.” I discuss how the surveillance and accountability brought about by testing redefine *teachers’* roles, although many scholars have documented standardized testing’s negative impacts on students and their learning, as well (e.g., Darder, 2005; Meier, 2000; Ravitch, 2010). I also briefly discuss TFA as an example of neoliberalism, which illuminates some aspects of neoliberalism’s role in education, other than testing.

A Nation (Still) at Risk?

A Nation at Risk: The Imperative of Educational Reform (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) cites schools as “one of the many causes” of the country’s economic decline (p. 112). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2006) note that NCLB links the quality of the education system to the health of the economy, as did *A Nation at Risk* with its accusation that “the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity,” thus causing the U.S. to lose its competitive edge in the global marketplace. However, Hursh (2007) argues that the 1980s recession was caused, in fact, not by bad schools and bad teachers but by Federal Reserve Board policies and by “multinational corporations exporting jobs to low-wage countries” (p. 498). While NCLB is in part a reauthorization of the

Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), Spring (2005) traces NCLB's roots back even further than it or *A Nation at Risk* to the National Defense Education Act (NDEA), arguing that federal policy has been concerned with education as a means to secure U.S. global economic and military dominance for some time.

Hursh (2007) argues that neoliberalism underlies both *A Nation at Risk* and NCLB, as well as most other recent educational reforms. He traces the “fear of falling economically behind other countries” that drives these reforms, and he argues that globalization—a globalization that requires free market capitalism—is taken as a “fact of life,” and thus educational reforms that “increase efficiency, accountability, fairness, and equality” are seen as necessary (p. 499). We all must be equipped to compete in the global marketplace. Standardized testing is seen as required in order to ensure that students are performing up to par. To use Apple's (2005) words again, testing is about the “constant production of evidence” that one is being efficient. Standardized testing provides not only “objective assessments” to those in education, but provides a “quality indicator” to parents, who are transformed into consumers of the best, “objective” measure of their child's performance (Hursh, 2007, p. 500).

In NCLB, closing the achievement gap is lumped in with increasing “educational efficiencies” (Hursh, 2007, p. 499). Given how neoliberalism “hijacks” language of equality, NCLB is able to appear like it serves the interests of all students, so it is difficult to rebuke NCLB and other neoliberal policies. Indeed, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2006) share examples of Secretary of Education Paige calling critics of NCLB “enemies of social justice” or a “terrorist organization” (p. 669). Despite its call to leave no child “behind,” many scholars have found that NCLB's high-stakes testing does not help students close the achievement gap and can actually further harm poor students and students of color (Darder, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Hursh,

2007; Theoharis, 2007) through AYP sanctions, its narrowing of knowledge, cultural bias of tests, and lack of funding to achieve mandates, among other things. Valencia (2010) argues that the “twin goal” of “equity” in *A Nation at Risk*, likewise, helped it garner broad support, but it was largely “lip service” (pp. 105-107) and not seen as part of the main goal of “excellence.” In fact, while the 1983 *Risk* report blamed schools for low achievement levels (and thus, the state of the economy), Darling-Hammond (2010) points out that there had been progress in closing the achievement gap in the 1960s and 70s due to targeted federal funding (pp. 18-22). However, much educational investment was undone during the Reagan era with the onset of the standards and accountability reform movements: “Conservatives introduced a new theory of reform focused on outcomes rather than inputs—that is, high-stakes testing without investing” (pp. 20-21).

While *Nation at Risk* marks the start of the current standards and accountability context, Americans have asked a lot of U.S. schools and have wanted to hold schools accountable since the common school was sometimes revealed as not so common—as not serving all students equally (Patton & Mondale, 2001). Indeed, the U.S. education system has been dealing with the tensions between “excellence” and excellence *for all* since before *Brown v. Board of Education* (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Reese, 2005). Though excellence and inclusion should not be mutually exclusive goals, public schools have struggled to educate all students regardless of gender, race, class, ability, language and religion without privileging one set of religious beliefs over others, for instance, or without excluding students based on disability. After World War II, more was asked of schools, and often schools faced contradictory demands (Reese, 2005; Spring, 2005). Reese (2005) argues that U.S. schools had to “satisfy the middle and lower classes simultaneously. As the schools became more socially inclusive, many people assumed, without

saying it so bluntly, that more equality meant more mediocrity” (pp. 218-219). This idea of schools as the “panacea” for society’s needs (p. 221)—and the critiques that come along with it—remains strong today, and it justifies increased testing and accountability measures.

While a gap in achievement needs to be closed, Kumashiro (2006) argues that simply closing the gap as it currently stands reproduces white middle-class privilege and uncritically asks poor students and students of color to *assimilate*:

Not often debated among policy makers and educational leaders are problems with the definitions and measures of achievement that frame this gap. People are not often asking whether we need to significantly change what we are trying to teach or how we are measuring what students are learning, as if the core curricula and the standardized tests are not themselves problematic. The focus remains on how to get all students to learn what white American students are learning, and to perform as they perform. The fear that they will be seen as dismissing the educational inequities experienced by certain racial groups helps to explain why many people are willing to respond to the disadvantages of students of color, but not the privileging of whiteness that engenders these gaps. (p. 170)

As Ladson-Billings (2006) points out, focusing deeply on the achievement gap can distract us from the “educational debt” and the educational inequities that would remain in place, even if we closed the gap.

Available for Surveillance: Teachers Must Be Made (ac)Countable

Scholars have studied how neoliberalism reshapes “the good teacher” (Connell, 2009; Lipman, 2004) and redefines “teacher quality” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006) in harmful, constricting manners. Teachers, seen as leeching off of the public rather than being “good,”

efficient, free market entrepreneurs on their own, must be brought into the neoliberal logics of competition:

It takes long-term and creative ideological work, but people must be made to see anything that is public as ‘bad’ and anything that is private as ‘good’. And anyone who works in these public institutions must be seen as inefficient and in need of the sobering facts of competition so that they work longer and harder. (Apple, 2005, p. 15)

NCLB and other neoliberal reforms include flawed assumptions about the nature of teachers’ work. For instance, “NCLB constructs an image of teachers that links their verbal and cognitive abilities directly to student outcomes” (Cochran-Smith, 2006, p. 677). In this view, teacher quality can be improved by simply testing incoming teachers’ cognitive abilities, “thereby discounting the value of master’s degrees or pedagogical coursework” (p. 677). NCLB also focuses heavily on subject-knowledge, denying the importance of “knowledge of pedagogy and the knowledge gained from teaching practica” (p. 672), and it instead bases interventions and “what works” practices on “SBR”, or (ostensibly) scientifically-based research (p. 673).

Connell (2009) traces the emergence of the audit culture, where “field-specific expertise (e.g. from prior experience as a teacher or principal) was devalued in favour of generic managerial skills and practices, using technical measures of organizational efficiency and effectiveness” (p. 217). Connell argues these audit culture pressures are compounded by two developments in education. One, school and teacher “effectiveness” research that “treats schools and teachers as bearers of variables (attitudes, qualifications, strong leadership, etc.)” can easily be “correlated with pupil outcomes, measured on standardized tests” (p. 217); and two, the neoliberal distrust of professionalism as “anti-competitive monopolies” means that, “specifically, neoliberalism distrusts teachers” (p. 217). This ability to measure—and the *need* to measure that

this distrust creates—makes testing *the* mode of education reform under neoliberalism, and it is hard to be critical of standardized testing in this “narrow discourse of quality and accountability” (Darder, 2005, p. 209). Sirotnik (2004) notes, however, that while neoliberalism redefines teachers and their work through business-like practices, such as motivating teachers with rewards and punishments, “remarkably absent in this rationale is the need for ongoing professional development so prevalent (and costly) in the corporate world” (p. 9).

Scholars note the way these neoliberal developments make teachers into “clerks” (Giroux, 2008, p. 3) or technicians. Teaching to the test transforms teaching and learning into what some have called a “teacher-proof” process (Darder, 2005; Saltman, 2009; Sawyer, 2003). Teachers feel the pressure to produce high test scores but feel limited in what and how they can teach (Moulthrop, Calegari, & Eggers, 2006). The reliance on testing misrepresents teaching as transmission and wrongly assumes “knowledge as an object that can be given more or less directly by one party to another” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006, p. 674). Darder (2005) argues that a “teacher-proof instructional approach makes it extremely uncomfortable and disturbing for those teachers who know their subjects well, who teach in ways that critically engage their students, and who want teaching to be linked to the realities of students’ lives” (p. 212), and this reliance on testing and prepackaged curricula “fails to consider the wealth of research and literature on teaching and learning to inform its execution” (p. 212).

Indeed, to be a good teacher under neoliberalism, one does not have to gain teaching experience, collaborate with colleagues, conduct inquiry into their own practice, or learn from past literature—one only has to go shopping! A good teacher must be a consumer of certain products, and government guidelines like the What Works Clearinghouse are more than happy to provide these products: “Teachers are to be prudent consumers of the reservoir of resources for

instructional decisionmaking that can be found in products created by experts in the field and certified by SBR” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006, p. 678). Teachers cannot rely on themselves and their professional knowledge: “Teacher-generated curriculum becomes an absurdity, because it cannot be competitively assessed” (Connell, 2009, p. 218).

If teachers are the new consumers, testing and curricula are the new market. Darder (2005) notes that in the 1990s the Ford Foundation “estimated that nearly 130 million standardized tests were being administered to elementary and secondary students, at an estimated cost of \$500 million per year” (pp. 210-211). Neoliberal reforms are profitable because they require lots of stuff (Kumashiro, 2006, p. 169)! However, we should not assume “that the science behind educational research is disinterested and rigorous” (Metcalf, 2002, p. 22). Although conservatives do not have the monopoly on supporting neoliberal practices, Metcalf (2002) notes how the Bush Administration helped to pry open the education system to the market, pointing out the connections between the Bush family and “the so-called Big Three [of standardized testing and textbook publishing]—McGraw-Hill, Houghton-Mifflin and Harcourt General” (p. 19). The McGraws and the Bushes, especially, have close ties with one another. As governor of Texas, Bush gathered a group of consultants, many of whom were from McGraw-Hill, to discuss “scientific research” on literacy and to propose a reading curriculum for the state. Metcalf quotes education professor Richard Allington: “Not surprisingly, the ‘research’ was presented as supporting McGraw-Hill products” (p. 20). More recently, other for-profit corporations have continued to attract criticism for pushing their “solutions” into different realms of education, often trying to solve the alleged “problem” of bad teachers. The Fordham Institute, for example, with its National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ), has long been interested in dismantling teacher education programs (Au, 2013). Pearson continues to influence teacher education with its

administering of the edTPA, potentially undermining teacher educators' authority (Madeloni, 2014; Winerip, 2012). Au (2013) worries that the edTPA "falls prey to the same problems with other high-stakes, standardized tests: the negative impact on teaching and curriculum, and the reliance on distant assessors to make sense of a sample of student work and then pass final judgment."

TFA as a Neoliberal Technology

In addition to the testing culture I have described, an examination of TFA offers another illustration of how neoliberalism works in education. TFA began as the senior thesis project of Princeton student, Wendy Kopp (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Kopp, 2001). Kopp's idea was to recruit seniors from top universities across the country and convince them to teach in under-resourced rural and urban schools for a two-year commitment. She wanted to attract college students who were not necessarily interested in education, but who would pause in the pursuit of their careers for two years to teach in hard-to-staff schools (Kopp, 2001). This national teacher corps model has since expanded to a global scale in "Teach For All," including Teach First UK, Teach For Australia, Teach For China, and Teach First Deutschland, to name a few (Miner, 2010). There are currently Teach For All "fast track schemes" (McConney, Price, & Woods-McConney, 2012) in 26 countries (Teach For All, n. d.). TFA and its counterpart programs in other nations continue to attract college students who may not plan to stay in the classroom after two years, but who will advocate for education reform from whatever career path they pursue. Applicants need not have a teacher education background; the only preparation TFA recruits undergo prior to being placed in a classroom is TFA's five-week summer institute program. According to TFA's 2013 "Annual Letter" or annual report ("Annual Letter", 2013), there were almost 11,000 active corps members teaching in 48 regions of the U.S. TFA had more than

48,000 applicants for the 2012-2013 year. Farr (2010) says that by 2010, TFA had “trained and supported almost twenty-five thousand teachers in communities and schools where the achievement gap is most pronounced,” teaching almost three million children (p. 1). The TFA report estimates that the total number of alumni and corps members will be 32,000 by the end of 2014 (“Annual Letter”, 2013).

Although popular and highly publicized, TFA is not unique in its alternative teacher preparation approach. Darling-Hammond (1994) critiques TFA for, among other things, using an old “emergency” route to teaching. However, Zeichner (2010) argues that neoliberalism has encouraged a new surge of “deregulation and competition in initial teacher education,” (p. 1545); there has been a “tremendous growth of alternatives to traditional college and university-based teacher education that include many new for-profit companies and universities that have gone into the business of preparing teachers” (p. 1545). Recently, New York State has helped allow TFA to grant masters degrees to its members, even though it is not a university (Foderaro, 2010; Zeichner, 2010). TFA teachers are often hired with an alternative certification and must obtain the teaching credential necessary for their region during their two-year commitment. Some choose to pursue a master’s degree—either through a university program that partners with TFA, or through a degree-granting non-profit like TFA itself (Miner, 2010). Although TFA’s training has changed over the years, critics—sometimes TFA alumni—continue to fault TFA teachers’ level of preparedness (Strauss, 2013a; 2013b).

While alternative teaching programs are not automatically bad, and historically some have been progressive in encouraging teachers to stay in poor schools, the programs of late “are often closely linked with a technicist view of the role of teachers and with efforts to erode teachers’ autonomy and collegial authority” (Zeichner, 2010, p. 1545). With its “teaching as

leadership” mantra, TFA seems to promote this teacher-as technician-view. Certainly, leadership can be complex, but TFA uses a managerial, business conception of leader in which teachers must “inspire” and “motivate” their students (Farr, 2010). To be “highly effective” teachers, TFAers should be “maximizing efficiency with organization and routine” (p. 161), for example. Steps four and five of the six key steps to being “highly effective” teachers are: “Execute effectively,” and “Continuously increase effectiveness” (Farr, 2010)! Further, “Good leadership is an understandable and universal process” (p. 176). Instead of traditional teacher education, TFA wants corps members to utilize their leadership experiences from college and translate them to the classroom. At a university information session I attended about TFA, a TFA representative described the kinds of applicants the organization wanted:

There’s a lot of different ways to show us that you’re really taking a hold of your own college experience and you’re being a leader. And we really think these principles of being a strong leader are very transferrable into a classroom setting.

TFA wants college students who are the presidents of fraternities and the chairs of student clubs; TFA is less interested in pedagogical knowledge. This TFA representative explained her teaching philosophy in the corporate-like terms of setting goals and investing:

Similar to if you were running a student organization, or running a service project, or being a manager at a store—you set a goal for your team, you invest them in wanting to work towards it, and then you set up all of the management systems and continuously figure out how you can improve and actually get to the goal, which is exactly what I had to do in my classroom.

Veltri (2010) finds that the culture of TFA is very corporate. Its administration handles public relations, for example, quieting any “bad publicity” and spending money to protect its

public image (pp.76-79). TFA's summer institute uses a "corporate-like framework" that includes team-building exercises and uses former corps members to lead the training (p. 54). Veltri points out that "All-Corps" meetings included celebrations to observe when corps members' students achieved high test scores and other feats, and functioned to show that "one's affiliation with TFA separated corps members from other non-TFA first and second year teachers in public schools" (p. 69). Veltri writes that this affiliation allowed for "'corporate-like perks' for its corps, as TFA teachers are offered opportunities to meet high-profile individuals and participate in organizational outings (similar to corporate events that are closed to the public)" (p. 69).

Beyond its fondness for "efficient," data-driven approaches and its focus on student test scores, the extent to which TFA functions as a neoliberal technology can be seen by considering the educational ventures started by some of its most touted alumni, such as the KIPP charter school network started by Mike Feinberg and David Levin where TFAers commonly teach (Miner, 2010), and the "Students First" organization headed up, until recently, by Michelle Rhee which aims to eliminate teacher tenure (Gabriel & Dillon, 2011). These alumni operations promote neoliberal logics that schools be put into competition with another, made efficient through privatization, and made accountable through auditing practices, and they reject protections and job security for teachers. I have argued elsewhere (Pitzer, 2010) that despite TFA's claim that it takes no policy positions (Miner, 2010), TFA is pretty clearly anti-union, partly blaming teacher unions for the problems of urban schools. Following Ong's (2006) insight that neoliberalism reorganizes space and people with different degrees of discipline, I said that TFA

and other business-inspired reform models so prevalent under neoliberalism aid in maintaining two sets of populations and spaces that are regulated in different, unequal ways: the poor, urban public school and its “bad” unionized teachers, seen as unable to manage themselves and thus, in need of discipline, versus the motivated teacher-managers—often white and middle class—who are trained for the private sphere, “freed” from the constraints of bureaucracy to work under more “flexible” conditions. (Pitzer, 2010, p. 72)

While TFA wants to improve student achievement (as defined by test scores), TFA also highlights the benefits that the TFA experience delivers to teachers *themselves*, especially after the corps. After two years, TFA members are encouraged to use the experience they gained to influence educational policy and build a “movement,” but also to enhance their own careers. TFA offers the chance for its teachers to “do good” *and* “do well,” in ways that teacher education programs do not (Labaree, 2010). The first brochures I received at an information session for potential applicants were titled “Career Spotlight,” each describing advantages for different post-corps careers: “Joining Teach For America before pursuing a career in business will provide you with the management experience and leadership skills that will help you have a greater impact in the business world.” And as one recruiter said in an interview regarding the value of the TFA “experience”, “You’re getting the best experience you could possibly get; you’re just thrown in a classroom...”

TFA could arguably be said to raise the status of teaching, but it does so only in the neoliberal terms in which privatization rules: “Teach for America has become the gold standard of public service, proof that teaching in public schools can be prestigious, even glamorous....Its recruiters stand alongside Goldman Sachs at college job fairs” (Azimi, 2007, p. 3). More than

recruit alongside, “T.F.A. has partnerships with investment banks and consulting firms, Goldman Sachs and JP Morgan among them. Some even offer deferrals and signing advances for those who do T.F.A. first” (Azimi, 2007). Miner (2010) also notes TFA’s ties to other corporations and organizations that intend to privatize K-12 education, such as the Walton Foundation and the Doris and Donald Fisher Fund.

Urban Schools and the Deficit Discourse

“‘All children can learn!’ the advocates for [the accountability] agenda say hypnotically, as if the tireless reiteration of this slogan could deliver to low-income children the same clean and decent infrastructure and the amplitude of cultural provision by experienced instructors that we give the children of the privileged....To isolate the victim, and shortchange the victim, and then tell him he can “learn to his potential” if he and his teachers just try hard enough, is one of those bizarre political performances that’s very much in fashion in our nation’s capital today” (Kozol, 2005, p. 266).

Literature on urban education suggests that deficit thinking predominates in urban schools. This deficit discourse is a racialized approach that constructs poor urban students as lacking, that blames urban students and their communities for the state of their schools, that ignores students as resources, and that often results in excessive attempts to discipline and control students (Delpit, 1995; García & Guerra, 2004; Valencia, 1997; 2010; Weiner, 1993; 2003). This deficit approach to urban education frames students, their families and neighborhoods as problems that the educational system must overcome. Some scholars (Theoharis, 2007; Valencia, 1997; 2010) have used the term “deficit thinking” to refer to this blame-the-victim mentality, while others (Weiner, 2003) have used “deficit paradigm.” I tend to use “deficit discourse” because I want to highlight practices and material effects, and discourse

includes this material connotation (Hall, 2003; Shields, Bishop, & Mazawi, 2005), but I sometimes interchange the terms.

The deficit discourse has its roots in eugenicist views on race and genetics, as well as in the “culture of poverty” studies or research on the “culturally deprived child” (Alonso et al., 2009; Reese, 2005; Shields et al., 2005; Valencia, 1997; 2010; Weiner, 1993). The language of “culture” sounds nicer than biological pathologies, but culture still can be used to “talk about essential differences among racial groups without having to use the now-loaded language of biological ‘races’” (Alonso et al., 2009, p. 53). Indeed, Valencia (2010) says that depending on the time period, “low-grade genes, inferior culture and class, or inadequate familial socialization” are all satisfactory ways to explain the “transmit [of] alleged deficits” (p. 18).

Valencia (2010) traces deficit thinking through U.S. history, as, for example, underlying compulsory ignorance laws that kept black youth from reading, as well as promoting formalized school segregation (pp. 9-12). One contemporary example of using deficit thinking can be found in Ruby Payne’s work, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*. Valencia notes that she labels herself “‘The leading U.S. expert on the *mindsets* of poverty, middle class, and wealth’ (front cover, Payne, 2005)” (Valencia, 2010, p. 68). In fixing poverty as a stable “mindset”—a deficient, flawed way of thinking or characteristic within the poor themselves—Payne shifts the meaning of poverty from a material reality toward a self-defeating *attitude* that needs only to be changed (Valencia, 2010, pp. 78-79). Valencia critiques Payne’s assertion that for the poor, “education is ‘valued and revered as abstract but not as *reality*,’” and points out that it is a myth that poor people and people of color do not value education (p. 79). Valencia goes on to offer a detailed critique of Payne’s work, and draws on other scholars who also analyze how she engages in deficit thinking. Gorski (2008) is perhaps the best-known critic of Payne’s work.

Gorski is concerned that Payne takes a deficit approach and constructs poor students as coming to school with inferior mindsets, and he critiques Payne's focus on assimilation to middle-class culture rather than a systematic challenge to poverty. It is important to note Ruby Payne's work because, despite these critiques and despite the fact that she is not subject to peer review, she has been widely used outside the academy, selling over 1,000,000 copies of *Framework* and has "provided training to hundreds of thousands of educators and other professionals" (Valencia, 2010, p. 68).

Linking deficit thinking to behaviorist models, Valencia (2010) notes that deficit thinking "offers a *description* of behavior in pathological or dysfunctional ways—referring to deficits, deficiencies, limitations, or shortcomings in individuals, families, and cultures" (p. 14). Deficit thinking also offers an "*explanation*" of the behavior by locating a factor *within* the individual (or family or culture), like "limited intelligence or linguistic deficiencies" (p. 14), and then offers the "*prediction*" that the behavior will continue unless there is an *intervention* (p. 14). In schools, low-achieving students are often described as "at-risk" (Shields et al., 2005; Valencia, 1997; 2010). Theoharis (2007) notes that this at-risk behavior or identity is explained by difference: "Deficit thinking is pervasive across school and communities. This view of children and families assumes that difference—meaning, not White, not middle class or affluent, and not without disability—is deficient" (p. 11). The difference explanation places blame in or on the student him or herself, and thus the *student* is in need of repair or fixing.

García and Guerra (2004) say educational programs that have worked for dominantly positioned students and families are often assumed to work for students from "low-income and culturally/linguistically diverse (CLD) communities," and that when these programs fail, CLD students and families are blamed, and "deficit beliefs are likely to be reinforced" (p. 151). On the

flip side, special programs—interventions—for poor students focus on fixing a “supposed cultural deficiency”: “teaching students how to look at the teacher, dress right, and act and speak accordingly” (Alonso, et al., 2009; p. 201). Both approaches locate the deficiency within the student him or herself and do not take into account the privileged norms of whiteness and middle class-ness to which urban students are meant to assimilate. When urban students do well, in fact, only then is a systemic or structural reason pursued. For example, when “too many” students of color qualify for advanced math classes, the deficit discourse makes this difficult to believe: “The mere fact that Black and Latino students are doing well at something is taken to imply a lack of rigor in the something that they are doing” (Payne, 2008, p. 78). In this example, we can see how the deficit discourse *persists* to *produce* urban students as “low-achieving” or “at-risk” even when they actually achieve high. To use Fine and Ruglis’ (2009) wording, through the deficit discourse, there is a “tattooing...of ‘lack’ onto most Black, Latino, immigrant, and/or poor students” (p. 20).

A large piece of the deficit discourse is the belief that families of urban students do not value education and that students do not enter school ready to learn (Alonso et al., 2009; Burke & Burke, 2005; Delpit, 1995; García & Guerra, 2004; Payne, 2008; Shields et al., 2005; Valencia, 1997; 2010). As Charles Payne (2008) argues, this conviction in the “ineducability of most children and the apathy of their parents” can let urban teachers off the hook: “The modal teacher belief is that by the time students start school, the great majority of them have already been so damaged that only a handful can be saved; thus, it doesn’t matter much what teachers do” (p. 73). García and Guerra (2004) found in their study that when asked about students’ characteristics, urban teachers often discussed “students’ life experiences or behaviors (e.g.,

burdened, underprivileged, disrespectful, or disorderly) rather than their learning characteristics or needs” (p. 160).

Burke and Burke (2005) argue, “Much of the current focus on improving underperforming schools, specifically in socio-economically disadvantaged neighborhoods and communities, is framed as an outreach effort to ensure that students come to school ‘ready for school’” (p. 282). The interests that urban students bring to the classroom are devalued, and their diversity of experience is seen as “an obstacle to overcome rather than a resource to embrace” (p. 282). Burke and Burke propose reframing current school reform that is based on students’ lack of “readiness” for school by instead thinking about ways in which *schools* can be made “student-ready.” Deficit discourse can hide in the way teachers say they care for and love their students because there is an implicit blame placed on parents who are perceived as not doing this care work. García and Guerra (2004) found that in seeing students as in need of care, they were seen less as in need of learning: “Expressions of caring often occurred at the expense of academic instruction, which led us to question how much of the students’ low academic performances...was a reflection of limited academic time on task versus their learning abilities” (p. 161).

The deficit discourse is complex because it is not only about race or class, but it also can be about language, culture, disability, and—importantly, for how it functions in urban schools—space. García and Guerra (2004) note that scholarly work analyzing deficit discourse or thinking does not always address the interlocking systems that shape students as “deficient.” The deficit approach is not something that just white teachers who teach students of color are guilty of, for example, although white teachers are the majority of U.S. teachers (p. 155). Payne (2008) writes that he was surprised at the way both white and non-white teachers in urban schools made

negative comments about students in front of students, but says he should not have been surprised: “Being nonwhite hardly makes one impervious to dominant narratives about race” (p. 78).⁶

The deficit discourse not only produces the “at-risk” student who needs to be controlled, remediated, disciplined, tracked, (insert intervention here), but it also helps to produce powerful public conceptions of urban schools and the space of “The Urban.” To provide a sense of the Urban and how it is a meaning-packed, “already known” concept, I quote Henke’s (2008) description of the film *Dangerous Minds* at length; it so captures how the deficit discourse constructs the Urban not just for educators, but for those in dominant social locations in the wider public:

‘Gangsta’s Paradise’ plays as the camera flashes images of graffiti, a homeless person, housing projects, and so on. A typography of the inner city as white, middle-class audiences want to see it, as it is ‘already known’ it exists, is presented before viewers much in the manner of a well-set table; all the senses are attracted to come and dine, simply because that is what is done at such a table. Suddenly, on the screen, a yellow school bus appears, a symbol of education and ‘normalcy,’ but it is decayed and decrepit. Viewers are driven through a contemporary ‘hell,’ outside one’s self and yet within a comfortable viewing distance; of course, the viewer will stay and dine. (p. 101)

Shields et al. (2005) explain why space becomes central under the deficit discourse:

It is the pathologizing metaphor, with its root meaning in disease, that suggests, as a cure for the malady, ‘quarantining the victim’ as in the establishment of separate schools,

⁶ Pathologizing students and families is not unique to poor students and students of color in the U.S. (See, for example, Shields et al., 2005, for a discussion on the deficit discourse’s harm on Maori students in New Zealand.) Special education and disability studies scholars, too, have recognized and critiqued deficit discourses that construct students with disabilities as lack (e.g., Hehir, 2002; Shakespeare, 2006).

classes, programs, or special curriculum, often compensatory, to ‘make up’ for the deficiencies of the student. (p. 17)

The space of the urban school becomes a sealed-off container where Others can be “disposed,” (Fine & Ruglis, 2009), in which the logic of the inherently “diseased” urban students legitimizes the quarantining.

Urban Teachers and the Dual Discourses of Blame: Deficit and Neoliberal Discourses

“...it is important to avoid centering on teachers as the problem, which detracts from the critical examination of systemic factors that perpetuate deficit thinking and reproduce educational inequities for students from nondominant sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds” (García & Guerra, 2004, p. 154).

“If we give people an enormously challenging task and only a fraction of the resources they need to accomplish it, sooner or later they start to turn on one another, making the job more difficult still. If we are not mindful of the inadequacy of the resource base, it always seems as if the problem is just those nutty people teaching in urban schools, as opposed to the conditions under which we expect them to teach” (Payne, 2008, p. 24).

I have described deficit discourse and how it harms urban students through excessive control, low expectations, blame, and other ways, and how it also blames students’ families and communities for school failure. While many scholars have documented the harm that deficit discourse causes urban students, some have signaled that this discourse can also harm *teachers*. Here I consider that teachers are not only perpetrators of the deficit discourse but also subjected to it. Further, I consider how the neoliberal technologies that constrict teachers—such as the high-stakes tests and test-based curricula that prioritize efficiency that I have discussed—greatly parallel the deficit discourses that also impair urban teachers and their work. In other words, here

I examine how the discourses of neoliberalism and the deficit paradigm of the Urban function together to construct urban teachers' work.⁷

The Deficit Discourse Harming Urban Teachers

Weiner (2003) points out that there are two common approaches to understanding the failure of urban schools: the student-deficit paradigm which blames students, and the teacher-deficit paradigm which blames teachers: “[The deficit paradigm blaming students] has frequently been challenged with another explanation that shifts attention away from student deficiencies and instead scrutinizes deficiencies of individual teachers” (p. 305). I want to explore how this deficit paradigm is one in the same, blaming *both* urban students and urban teachers for the state of their schools, and subjecting both to various “interventions” and controls. Drawing these two “explanations” together seems productive in disrupting the teachers-versus-students-and-parents trap that we get caught in when education is in “crisis”—when the nation is at “risk”—and someone has to be the scapegoat. I do not mean to argue that urban teachers are harmed by the racialized deficit discourse *just like urban students*. I do not want to lose the conceptual power or the particularity of the “deficit discourse” by arguing that all kinds of blame are part of deficit discourse. Indeed, neoliberal logics seem to account for most of the blame directed at teachers while deficit discourse accounts for the blame placed on urban students. However, here I consider how deficit thinking also affects teachers working in urban schools.

Not all scholars who study the deficit discourse see teachers as merely perpetrators of it. García and Guerra (2004)'s work focuses on professional development for teachers that aims to disrupt deficit thinking, but they do not want to make teachers the new objects of blame: “Rather

⁷ These are not the only discourses to which urban teachers are subject, and all teachers are subject to school organization and bureaucratic controls (Ingersoll, 2003). Also, teaching historically has been devalued and analyzed as a feminized profession (e.g. Biklen, 1995). In Chapter Four, I also briefly describe a developmental approach to understanding children, which is a prevalent discourse in schools.

than make educators the new targets of deficit thought, our work reinforces the importance of professional development that identifies elements of the school culture and the school climate that lead to institutional practices that systemically marginalize or pathologize difference” (p. 154). Despite good intentions and not consciously or purposefully holding deficit ideas about their students, many urban educators blame students for their own low achievement (García & Guerra, 2004; Theoharis, 2007). Teachers suffer from the glaring “power of the deficit paradigm that is reinforced continually by school practices, policies, and organizational arrangements” (Weiner, 2003, p. 311). For example, teachers are often caught in the catch-22 of well-intentioned policies that require students to be labeled “at-risk” (Shields et al., 2005, p. 18). The label may intend to secure extra support or funding for students, but the negative designation sticks to the student and makes it hard for teachers to see them otherwise.

I want to argue that the trumping of teachers’ good intentions and this constrained view of their students are *themselves* impairments to urban teachers and their work, but the deficit discourse also causes more direct harms to teachers. For one, the deficit discourse interferes with teachers’ relationships with other colleagues. Weiner (2003), citing a study by Goddard et al. (2000), says that when teachers do not feel a “*collective* sense of efficacy” with their colleagues—“a conviction that despite the obstacles they face, the faculty as a group can teach successfully”—student achievement levels are lower (Weiner, 2003, p. 307). Such faculty collaboration is difficult when urban schools are ruled by a culture of blame. While not using the terms “deficit” thinking or discourse, Payne (2008) describes a similar concept—what he calls “the Principle of Negative Interpretation.” Effecting not just students and parents, urban teachers and administrators also operate within and are interpreted through this principle or atmosphere of blame:

Whatever other people do is interpreted in the most negative way possible. If parents don't show up at school, what does it mean? That they don't care. If a colleague fails to make hall duty, what does it mean? That she's blowing off her responsibility....But if parents do show up? They're just coming to stick their noses in our business. If the colleague show up for hall duty? Sucking up to the principal. (p. 25).

The deficit discourse can make teachers feel helpless or ineffective. Fine (1992) argues that urban teachers “themselves have been silenced over time”: “It is worth noting that correlational evidence (Fine 1983b) suggests that educators who feel most disempowered in their institutions are most likely to believe that ‘these kids can’t be helped’” (Fine, 1992, p. 121). Weiner (2003) notes that when an administration strictly regulates urban teachers, teachers can feel inadequate and, in turn, believe their students to be inadequate. She cites a study (Metz, 1987) that found that when a school attended by students with a negative “reputation” reopened and began admitting “students according to competitive entrance criteria,” the teachers remained stuck within a deficit paradigm, continued to teach in “routinized” ways, and continued to feel ineffective (Weiner, 2003, p. 308). Because of “administrative directives that made teachers feel inadequate,” and because of the power of the deficit discourse, teachers persisted in their old ways, *even without* “the physical presence of the students who [had] historically been characterized as deficient” (p. 308).

Clearly, urban teachers have more power in school than urban students (Biklen, 1995, p. 19), so we might expect that students suffer more harm through the deficit discourse that circulates within their schools. However, teachers are workers—workers who are not afforded a high public opinion (Biklen, 1995). We cannot forget that as workers, urban teachers are *part* of an institution (Connell, 2009), and that this institution and its discourses form the space that is

both the teachers' working environment and students' learning environment; although teachers and students are positioned differently within the urban school, they are both subject to the deficit discourse.

Urban Teachers: Negotiating Intersecting Discourses

Personal responsibility, personal accountability and the medical model. As Valencia (1997; 2010) recognized, the deficit model works to pathologize urban students along the lines of the behavioral or medical model of describing, explaining, predicting and treating "deficits." Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2006) argue that neoliberal testing policies also adhere to this logic because NCLB sees teaching, as stated by Secretary of Education Spellings, as "prescribing an instructional cure" (p. 681). Thus, neoliberalism intensifies the deficit view of students; poor students and students of color, already largely seen through the deficit discourse as "ailing from lack of skills" (p. 681), come to be constructed more thoroughly as "diseased" in this era of accountability. While all teachers bear the burden of having to "treat" students and get them "healthy" test scores, urban teachers become responsible for the, in a sense, seemingly doubly "sick" urban students.

In other words, the audit culture of neoliberalism can compound the pathologizing effect of the deficit discourse because both forces house fault in the individual. This "racialized neoliberal logic" says that "private management and the market foster entrepreneurship, individual responsibility, choice, and discipline" (Lipman, 2011, p. 91), which the "deficient" individuals in urban schools allegedly need. There is a parallel between the "personal responsibility" rhetoric that serves as the solution to the supposed deficits of poor students and students of color, à la Bill Cosby (Alonso et al, 2009, p. 203), and the "personal accountability" logic that is a feature of neoliberalism. These similar individualistic discourses both take the

focus off of costly investments into education and the public. Referring to the “never-ending repertoire of self-help strategies” offered up to poor students and students of color, Alonso et al. (2009) argue, “There is an obvious appeal to these pedagogies of moral uplift. They come cheap” (p. 203). As well, as Connell (2009) points out, the “widespread consensus” that quality teachers are important is *not* followed by a “pouring [of] vast resources into teacher education,” but rather further testing and regulation of individual teachers (p. 214).

Less access to the knowledges urban teachers need. Perhaps the most crucial point where neoliberalism and deficit thinking converge is in the shift in the purpose of education and the change in what counts as knowledge (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006; Compton & Weiner, 2008; Sleeter, 2008). As education’s purpose changes from “preparation partially for citizenship” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006, p. 1948) to the production of a “minimally trained and flexible workforce that corporations require to maximize their profits” (Compton & Weiner, 2008, p. 5), knowledges of social change, social justice and multicultural education have no place. With this narrowed view of knowledge under neoliberalism, the harm of the deficit discourse cannot be as thoroughly analyzed. In other words, neoliberalism maligns the very knowledge practices that *allow for* and *foster* a critique of the deficit discourse’s harmful effects on poor students and students of color. Further, neoliberalism phases out knowledges capable of offering critiques of neoliberalism, as well!

Social justice educators and others who recognize the harm of deficit discourse (e.g. García & Guerra, 2004; Ladson-Billings; 2006; Theoharis, 2007; Weiner, 2007) aim to challenge it through various ways (reframing perceptions of students, encouraging the use of a cultural lens, culturally relevant teaching, etc.). But as Sleeter (2008) points out, teacher education is being recast as simply training to get your students to get high test scores. Under

neoliberalism, teacher education moves “away from explicit multicultural, equity-oriented teacher preparation,” and teacher education programs are instead “being compelled to jettison not only explicit equity-oriented teacher preparation, but also learning-centered teaching, in order to prepare technicians who can implement curriculum packages” (p. 1952). Indeed, university-based teacher education programs are not always successful in instilling social justice practices and values in their pre-service teachers, even when these programs claim or intend to do so (Sleeter, 2001; Zeichner 2009).

Teacher education is not the only place where a social justice orientation can take hold for urban teachers, but other opportunities like professional development are decreased, too. When there is professional development, it is often driven by NCLB demands, “structured around learning to use commercially produced curriculum packages” (Sleeter, 2008, p. 1954). If there is no space for urban teachers to learn about and challenge the deficit discourse, it remains in place, and potentially intensifies. As Giroux (2008) argues,

As corporate power undermines all of the notions of the public good and increasingly privatizes public space, it obliterates those public spheres in which there might emerge criticism that acknowledges the tensions wrought by a pervasive racism that ‘functions as one of the deep, abiding currents in everyday life...’ (Giroux, p. 63, quoting Geiger)

Conclusion

Rose (2009) recognizes that while “... ‘qualified teachers’ are praised in public documents and speeches, teachers are often pegged as the problem” (p. 57). While the devaluing of teachers’ work in the U.S. has a longer history (Biklen, 1995; Goldstein, 2014; Olsen, 2014), the surveillance and distrust of teachers has intensified in the neoliberal era. This chapter has intended to examine how urban teachers are turned into “problems” and what kinds of harm they

experience. While Michelle Rhee, Joel Klein, and other education policy makers and researchers claim in their “manifesto” that public schools are places *for* teachers (and for unions), and not students (“How to Fix Our Schools”, 2010), I have examined literature that shows how urban schools are for neither student nor teacher. The dissertation adds to the literature by addressing and unpacking the negative effects of *both* neoliberalism and the racist, classist deficit discourse. This dual focus is important, not only because it highlights the harms that urban teachers and students experience (despite that neoliberal advocates cloak their approaches in language that is often borrowed from those seeking social justice and equality), but because of the ways the blame game played on teachers *misdirects* our attention from—and keeps intact—racist, capitalist systems that are largely to blame for educational injustices.

CHAPTER THREE

Methods

Why Qualitative Methodology? Why Voice?

Qualitative methodology has become known for giving voice to subjugated groups or individuals (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; DeVault, 1990; Dunbar, Rodriguez, & Parker, 2002; Jackson & Mazzei, 2009; Orner, 1992; Ramazanoğlu, 2002; Rodriguez, 2010; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Van Maanen, 1998). It becomes necessary to “give voice” to those whose experiences and perspectives are left out of and at odds with existing social relations. Qualitative researchers working from standpoint or other feminist traditions, for instance, assert that including women’s voices helps to illuminate how these social relations are not neutral or natural but *gendered* relations; they are based on men’s experiences and are organized to benefit men (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Biklen, 1995; DeVault, 1990; McCorkel & Myers, 2003; McNamara, 2009; Watts, 2006). Critical race theorists (Dunbar, Rodriguez, & Parker, 2002; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Rodriguez, 2010; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) and other qualitative researchers interested in white privilege and racism aim to give voice to people of color, whose perspectives are excluded by dominant, racist social and political systems. They pay attention to how race and racism organize all aspects of the social, including the research process. This dissertation research has intended to give voice to urban teachers and to better understand the intricacies of their work at a time when the complexity of teachers’ work is largely invisible, when urban teachers and urban schools are constructed as failing, and when teachers—and other public workers—are increasingly deemed ineffective, inefficient, and in need of surveillance and discipline. Mills (1959) recognizes that individuals’ personal lives are affected by larger social

forces, and this dissertation seeks to contextualize how teachers' personal stories fit within the discursive structures that shape their work in urban schools.

Qualitative research does not have the monopoly on giving voice, but its focus on meaning-making, rich data and thick descriptions aims to reveal the research subject's perspective (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Geertz, 1973). While qualitative researchers can employ multiple techniques including participant observation, in-depth interviewing, focus groups, document analysis and case studies to get at participants' perspectives, I chose to use primarily in-depth interviewing and focus groups because I was interested in urban teachers' talk. (I discuss secondary data sources later in this chapter.) Qualitative interviewing is a flexible process, allowing "the interviewer considerable latitude to pursue a range of topics and offer the subject a chance to shape the content of the interview" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 104). Indeed, Watts (2006) describes this "loosely structured approach [as] the most often used method for gathering qualitative data and...highly appropriate for exploring the subjective experience of participants" (p. 397). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) argue that understanding the respondent's perspective is the researcher's main objective: "The researcher has to be captive to the large goal of the interview—understanding—not to the devices, gimmicks, questions, or the like that were invented as strategies and techniques of obtaining information" (p. 106).

Giving voice is not done only for understanding, a quest for "truth," or access to a less "distorted" reality (Harding, 1986), but for more political reasons. Because marginalized groups are often without voice, including their stories and perspectives can be a political act. Voice, like autonomy, "becomes important when one is restrained.... One does not think to emphasize autonomy when one's liberty or personal freedom does not seem constrained" (Biklen, 1995, p. 82). Hence, "giving voice" is political because it addresses the fact that some people do not

regularly have power, do not have voice. And people speak out in order to bring social transformation or social change: “The ‘voice’ component of critical race theory provides a way to communicate the experience and realities of the oppressed, a first step on the road to justice” (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 58). Starting with a subjugated group’s experiences can necessitate a change in existing social theories and concepts that previously did not account for those voices and experiences (DeVault, 1990; Harding, 1986). Those who already have voice do not need to be “given voice” in this same sense, although studying “up” can also reveal power relations (McCorkel & Myers, 2003).

However, the process of giving voice is difficult and complicated. When complications are glossed over, voice can easily become romanticized. Qualitative researchers have begun to problematize voice. For instance, the edited collection *Voice in Qualitative Inquiry: Challenging Conventional, Interpretive, and Critical Conceptions in Qualitative Research* asks “questions of the very notion of what constitutes voice, the voices we choose (or are able) to listen to, how we listen to them, and why we accept some as true and others not” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2009, p. 3). Method cannot automatically save us: “Researchers and interviewers cannot simply apply technical skills and be straightforwardly ‘objective,’ as if respondents were people whose subjectivity could be taken for granted” (Dunbar, Rodriguez, & Parker, 2002, p. 280). In other words, a participant’s subjectivity or voice is never straightforward, never simply apparent and there for the picking, and no method can magically guarantee access to subjects’ voices.

Recognizing both the importance of giving voice and the ease with which voice can be romanticized, this dissertation intends to give voice to urban teachers without simplifying their voices or taking them merely as “truth.” I attend especially to the relationship between discourse and voice; I take seriously teachers’ voices as well as the discourses that shape their perspectives

and with which they must navigate. In this chapter, I first situate my study within work on “teacher voice.” I then describe my research design and research sites, the participants themselves, data collection, data analysis, and the writing process. I then discuss my subjectivity and how my position impacted the research-participant dynamic. I conclude with some limitations of the study.

Teacher Voice

“Recognizing and respecting teachers’ voices and the worth of the knowledge and experience they articulate gives teachers rightful redress against the background of this previous and prolonged silence” (Hargreaves, 1996, pp. 12-13).

“Giving voice” to students makes sense because they do not hold positions of power in schools and are not often asked to participate in school policy-making and reform (Bragg, 2001; Cook-Sather, 2002; Mitra, 2001; 2007). Student voice research follows the research done in traditions of feminist standpoint theory, critical race theory, and other political movements that aim to include voices of those groups or individuals who have been excluded from dominant meaning-making systems. (Of course, “the subjugated” are never fully oppressed to the extent that they have no agency or voice at all. People have intersectional identities that often position them contradictorily within power, and certain aspects of identity shift in and out of focus across different contexts.) “Teacher voice” research may seem an odd phrase because teachers are often understood as the dominant force in relation to their students; teachers are perhaps not so clearly “the oppressed” who need to come to voice:

Teachers have power over children.... Teachers do not always use their power over children well.... Like other street-level bureaucrats, they often do ‘the best they can’ within a structure that disempowers students; the best they can do in the situation is bad.

They participate in the school's role in reproducing social relationships. (Biklen, 1995, p. 19)

However, teachers often have little power as workers (Atkinson & Rosiek, 2009; Biklen, 1995; Fine, 1992; Hargreaves, 1996; Kirk & Macdonald, 2001).

Like students' voice, teachers' voice is never in a vacuum. Researchers' task is to connect teachers' stories to the "structural conditions that influenced the interpretations teachers made of their experiences" (Biklen, p. 50). One such current condition that must be considered is "effective teaching research" (Atkinson & Rosiek, 2009), which is part of the larger neoliberal project, that I discuss further in Chapters Two and Five. Teachers have been left out of policy conversations, and sometimes teachers have been blamed or otherwise misrepresented in the educational research focused on "teaching effectiveness" (Hargreaves, 1996). This effective teaching research can marginalize teachers' voices, especially in this era of "evidence-based" decision making and accountability: "Effective teaching research and the teacher education curriculum based on it ignores the possibility of knowledge being generated by teachers' inquiries and experiences into their own practical experience" (Atkinson & Rosiek, 2009, p. 175). The urban teachers in my study felt the brunt of what Atkinson and Rosiek (2009) call a movement "to create 'teacher proof' curriculum" (p. 175), and they felt pressured to comply with these demands: "[T]eachers are treated as piece workers, as opposed to professional decision makers. The consciousness and creative intelligence of teachers are removed from the pedagogical process" (p. 175). These teacher-proofing pressures combine with the public's sense that, because we have all been students, we "know" teaching to a certain extent—even if that "knowing" is that we understand teachers' work as simple and straightforward, rather than complex, ideological work that occurs within hierarchical institutions (Britzman, 1986). The

public does not bestow teachers a high status, and researchers must “take their cultural position into account” (Biklen, 1995, p. 15), as well as the current neoliberal context of teacher-proofing.

While scholars note that creating a “teacher voice” can be a powerful strategy to talk back to “the hegemony of effective teaching research,” they recognize that “valorizing” teachers’ voices is also dangerous, and can assume an essentialist, “generic quality” of teacher knowledge (Atkinson & Rosiek, 2009, pp. 176-177). We also can lose the discursively produced aspect of teachers’ voice in focusing on “first-person teacher narratives” (p. 178). Rather than think about an individual teacher voice, Atkinson and Rosiek suggest “the need to create and sustain teacher communities that can support critical reflection on the many assumptions that guide teaching” (p. 178).

For Hargreaves (1996), the concern is that teacher voice is currently represented as only positive in the research: “Research on teachers’ voices and teachers’ knowledge is, accordingly, replete with studies of teachers who are caring, committed, and child-centered, but not of teachers who are cynical, traditional, sexist, or racist!” (p. 13). While I think there are actually many studies that critique teachers’ voice for being some of these negative things (see much of the student voice literature, for example), Hargreaves’ point is to guard against a kind of “generic worth” of teacher voice (p. 13); he points to complications in *the* teacher voice, or even teachers’ voices, plural. Hargreaves directs researchers to not study only the teachers whom we admire or who have similar philosophies of education: “Hear and study the voices of marginalized and disaffected teachers whose perspectives may threaten or challenge your own” (p. 17). We cannot just celebrate teachers’ voices: “the important thing seems...to be that we do not merely *present* teachers’ voices, but that we *re-present* them critically and contextually” (p. 15).

Research Design and Research “Sites”

This qualitative interpretive study explores how 13 urban teachers (12 current or former urban teachers and one soon-to-be teacher) make sense of their work in urban schools through their talk, and it investigates the discourses these teachers must navigate in making meaning of this work. The 13 teachers included three urban teachers involved in Project Voice who taught together in Upstate City, a mid-sized city in the northeast, and ten teachers who worked for TFA in urban school settings in various locations in the U.S. (I describe the participants more later in this chapter.) The study employs discourse analysis to examine the social structures underlying language, and a multi-sited ethnographic approach, an approach that defines its object of study through a “tracing within different settings of a complex cultural phenomenon” (Marcus, 1995, p. 106). Multi-sited ethnography makes connections between seemingly separate sites, to seek the “chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations” (Marcus, 1995, p. 105). This design is well-suited to studying discourse because it “shifts attention from the actual places where things happen to focus on how meanings get taken up, shift, and circulate across different situations” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 76). Multi-sited ethnography allowed me to examine how deficit and neoliberal discourses shift as they entwine with one another, and how teachers across different urban settings negotiate them. I trace how the blame game operates for teachers in these two different “sites,” which I describe in more detail later in this section—Project Voice and TFA. I began this section with “sites” in quotation marks to draw attention to the fact that, unlike a traditional ethnography which studies a group of people in one physical site in depth, I do not attempt to holistically examine all aspects of either Project Voice or TFA. Instead, I study each program as a site where deficit and neoliberal discourses circulate through teachers, as well as through the institutional structures and rules of urban schools. This multi-sited approach also

enables the conjunction of multiple sites “regardless of the variability of the quality and accessibility of that research at different sites” (Marcus, 1995, p. 100); I do not mirror what I do at each site, as I would in a traditional comparative study, for instance.

Other scholars have used a multi-sited ethnographic design to study a range of phenomena. Cohn’s (2006) study tracing how gender shapes national security discourse, for instance, relied on data from “fieldwork with national security elites and military personnel, as well as upon textual analysis of Department of Defense official reports, military documents, transcripts of Congressional hearings, news media accounts..., and popular film” (p. 92). In studying how women in a small Egyptian village made sense of a popular television program, cultural theorist Abu-Lughod (1997) also used a multi-sited approach. She found multi-sited ethnography necessary to answer the question, “How can we study the encounter between some Upper Egyptian village women and this television serial?” (p. 114). Abu-Lughod felt the need to “stretch” traditional ethnography to account for our complex, heavily mediated world, and her analysis traced between the television show itself, the villagers’ reading of this television text, and also the show’s producers in Cairo. Within educational research, scholars have, for example, advocated for using multi-sited ethnography to connect our understanding of how “young people’s multidimensional and multifaceted cultural lives intersect with contemporary structural, economic realities” (Weis & Dimitriadis, 2008, p. 2291). Weis and Dimitriadis’ (2008) work examines the “relationship between multiple sites—schools, community centers, job sites, and so forth” (p. 2309) and follows youth across these spaces. Baines’ (2012) work also follows students using a multi-sited ethnographic approach. Interested in how high school students with disabilities construct their identities, Baines studied two students as they moved “across contexts of school, debate team, and home” (p. 247).

TFA and Project Voice: Why These Sites?

I heard voices in my head. First, the objection that any empirical social scientist would have to a cultural studies analysis: “You don’t really justify why you chose these things to analyze and not others. Since there is an infinite world out there, what’s your sampling technique?”

The cultural studies voice responds: “There isn’t really an answer. All you can say is, these ones were available to me. My method derives its strength from the juxtaposition and layering of many different windows. Someone else who chose ten different windows might have come up with a very different analysis. I know that. But I think there is a lot of power in the fact that there are ten windows open, and among them, I have found these continuities.”

The feminist qualitative researcher chimes in: “Any investigation, and especially one of a field so vast..., is of necessity partial, in a variety of important ways.” (Cohn, 2006, pp. 92-93).

I include this lengthy quote from Cohn (2006) because it so captures some of the tensions I felt in designing my study and articulating why interviewing these different urban teachers made sense to me. Cohn approached her study on U.S. national security discourse from an interdisciplinary perspective, and this quotation demonstrates her trying to reign in her background in cultural studies, qualitative research grounded in anthropology and sociology, as well as feminist theory and methodology. Cohn argues that multi-sited ethnography helped her to design a study that could follow the production of national security discourse. Cohn’s dilemma of choosing some “windows” and not others, however, means her study’s choice of sites is partial, not arbitrary. While it may be the case that “[p]icking a focus, be it a place in the school,

a particular group, or some other aspect, is always an artificial act, for you break off a piece of the world that is normally integrated” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 60), I describe the reasons why I wanted to examine and juxtapose teachers’ voices from TFA and Project Voice in the following sections.

TFA. As I described in the literature review in Chapter Two, TFA’s stated goal is to close the achievement gap. TFA wants to ensure that all children receive an excellent education and that poverty does not determine a child’s future. TFA tries to accomplish this goal by “enlisting committed individuals”—recruiting college graduates who will motivate and have high expectations of poor students and students of color—and by placing these leaders who believe that “all children can achieve” in under-resourced or “low-performing” schools across the country (“Our Mission”, n.d.). TFA has grown in scale and in popularity since it began in 1990, even expanding to different countries through the “Teach For All” offshoot (McConney, Price, & Woods-McConney, 2012).

I first became interested in studying TFA because I had several teacher friends who, while not TFA teachers, were white teachers who had not been required to think critically about race, power and privilege in their teacher education programs, and who had begun working in urban schools, teaching mostly black students. My friends also attended high school and college with mainly white acquaintances, in small town and rural settings. I saw TFA as a space that potentially promoted this same dynamic—white or otherwise privileged people entering into urban spaces to teach poor students and students of color who they knew little about—on a large scale. Throughout my (admittedly anecdotal) friends’ stories about their teaching experiences were racist discourses around both rescuing and blaming students, neither of which seemed like a helpful way to struggle against and change educational inequities, let alone teach students. While

I believe these friends are well-meaning people, they lacked access to any kind of framework or language to talk about racism and white privilege, and they seemed to lack any meaningful relationships with people of color. As I began learning more about TFA's work in urban schools and reading some of the early critiques of TFA, I wondered if TFA teachers, perhaps similarly to my friends, were people who were well-intentioned but whose privileged positions and whose understandings of both their role in the urban classroom and their urban students limited their ability to change the educational inequities they were interested in ending. It is important to note, however, that TFA has worked to become more racially and socioeconomically diverse. While only 17 percent of teachers as a whole in the U.S. are people of color, Sawchuk (2014) reports that of this year's new TFA cohort of 5,300 teachers, half are people of color. As well, 47 percent received Pell Grants, and 22 percent are African-American.

As part of my first qualitative research class in my doctoral program, I conducted a pilot study to start to understand the experiences and perspectives of some urban TFA teachers. Scholars had conducted research on TFA, but many of the studies were quantitative and focused on TFA teachers' "effectiveness," as narrowly defined by their students' scores on standardized math and reading tests (see, for example, Decker, Mayer, & Glazerman, 2004). For the pilot study, I conducted participant observation and interviews with four participants, and this study helped me to discover some initial themes that I wanted to explore further, like the importance of "keeping control in the classroom" for TFA teachers and its connections to deficit thinking, as well as the shared belief that "TFA is for overachievers" (and that, often, non-TFA teachers are *not* overachievers). I also learned that I enjoyed qualitative interviewing and found it a helpful method in capturing some of the complexities and contradictions of teachers' perspectives. I liked that interviewing unearthed teachers' assumptions and the taken-for-granted values in

urban schools (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I continued my interview research with TFA teachers through my next qualitative methods course.

Project Voice. As I continued to think about my early data on TFA teachers and how they might lead into a larger dissertation study, I also had the opportunity to begin fieldwork for Project Voice, of which my advisor, Sari Knopp Biklen, was the principal investigator. Project Voice was a Chancellor's Leadership project, funded by the Carnegie Foundation. I was a research assistant on this project that set out to challenge the deficit approach in urban education, and that was rooted in the "new sociology of childhood" literature that constructs youth as social agents. For one year before starting fieldwork, I prepared literature reviews on "student voice" research and research that studied how to combat deficit thinking, and I helped carry out other planning activities. Once in the field, I, along with other researchers, worked with urban students and teachers to make films about school, positioning students as experts on their schooling experiences. The fieldwork for the project lasted two years; the first year took place in one public K-8 school (Garber School) in Upstate City, and the second year of research followed students to four other schools in the district after the original school closed. The three teacher participants from the first year of fieldwork were respected teachers who we asked to participate, in part, because they had a reputation for having high expectations for their students.

Multi-sited juxtaposition. While doing this work simultaneously, I noticed similarities in how teachers in these different spaces spoke about their work and their students. In many ways, the programs are very different. TFA teachers join a competitive organization that is popular among young people; they go through a short, alternative training route, prior to teaching in their own classroom; and they are required to teach for only two years, often in charter schools. Project Voice consisted of three teachers working in an urban public school who are

from the area where they teach, who became teachers through the traditional route, and who are still working in the district today. Project Voice teachers also did not identify as “Project Voice teachers” in the same way that TFA corps members identify as “doing TFA” (Stern & Johnston, 2013). But in other ways, the continuities of the teachers’ talk about urban school life and the permanency of deficit and other blaming discourses belied any easy, dichotomous divide between TFA “overachievers” and, to use Project Voice teacher Christine’s words, “status quo” teachers. I decided to investigate a multi-sited approach since I was beginning to notice links in the discourses that these different teachers navigated.

While early on I might have anticipated that TFA teachers were more prone to deficit discourses, with their lack of preparation, the Project Voice teachers also struggled with deficit thinking. The Project Voice site revealed that it was easier to address effects of the deficit discourse with students, rather than teachers. Students welcomed a chance to be seen as knowledgeable about school, to be experts rather than objects in need of fixing. Teachers’ good intentions and high expectations for student achievement were weak in the face of the powerful deficit discourse; despite wanting success for students, teachers often blamed students for the problems of school, in part to escape being blamed themselves. Early interviews with TFA teachers showed that despite their eagerness to change urban education, they also accepted deficit assumptions about their students, even as they critiqued the harm of low expectations. I also found that while TFA teachers—in their condemnation of the inadequate education urban students received—latched onto the idea that other, *non*-TFA teachers were the problem, Project Voice teachers also picked up the neoliberal logic of competition and strict individualism and blamed other teachers for the problems that urban schools faced.

It is significant to study how teachers from TFA and Project Voice negotiate deficit discourse because both projects aim to combat this piece of the blame game—at least at the level of the projects’ missions. Indeed, both programs are concerned with educational inequality. Teachers in both recognize that urban schools that serve poor students and students of color are not always successful, and they believe that students attending these schools deserve a good education. Studying teachers from these two contexts in tandem is important because it permits examination of how blaming discourses are taken up at different levels and in different locations. Because both TFA and Project Voice work to *counter* deficit thinking to some degree, they are contexts where the circulation of such discourse is more discernable. Investigating how the discourse continues to circulate even as teachers also intend to resist it is needed to better understand and challenge the blame game.

Participants

Before describing the data collection and data analysis processes, I discuss who an “urban teacher” is and what that term means in my study, and I introduce the study’s participants. This project studies discourse and how teachers’ understandings of their work were shaped through and against discourse, but it also studies individual teachers *as* individuals. In a study so focused on discourse, I want to highlight the participants who helped make the study possible and make sure their voices are central, as well. Table 1 identifies the 13 urban teachers whose talk from interviews and focus groups became the data for this study. Following a discussion of what I mean when I say my participants are “urban teachers,” I include short descriptions of each participant.

Table 1

Interview Participants

Name	Affiliation	Race and gender	City/area where the participant worked	Years spent teaching	Occupation at time of data collection	# of interviews
Christine	Project Voice	White woman	Upstate City	6	Teacher	2+
Jack	Project Voice	White man	Upstate City	10	Teacher	2+
Maddie	Project Voice	Black woman	Upstate City	8	Teacher	2+ ⁸
Ben	TFA	White man	Los Angeles	22	Teacher	1
Nisha	TFA	Indian woman	Los Angeles	2	Graduate student	1
Erica	TFA	White woman	Chicago	2	Graduate student	1
Emily	TFA	White woman	New York City	5	Teacher	2
Jonathon	TFA	Black man	Houston	5	Graduate student	2
Kelly	TFA	White woman	Atlanta, New York City	3	Assessment coordinator	1
Anne	TFA	White woman	Phoenix	2	Graduate student	1
Andre	TFA	Black man	Southeast U.S. ⁹	2	Graduate student	2
Pritika	TFA	Indian woman	Southeast U.S., Washington D.C.	3	Graduate student (graduating)	1
Leah	TFA	White woman	New York City	<1	TFA recruiter (becoming a TFA teacher)	2

⁸ I say “2+” because while I personally interviewed each Project Voice teacher twice for this project, they also took part in one and a half years of weekly focus groups.

⁹ I decided to not specify which city Andre and Pritika had worked in. Andre had taught in a KIPP school in the Southeast, and I wanted to preserve the fact that he worked at this type of school without risking identifying him.

Who *is* an Urban Teacher?

While I trouble the notions of teaching and the Urban, it is perhaps somewhat awkward to simply say this is a study of “urban teachers.” Indeed, I should not take “urban teachers” for granted as a group or identity, and I make the case for making both teachers and the Urban “unfamiliar” to, precisely, disrupt any givens or taken-for-granted notions we might have about urban teachers. In choosing “urban teachers” as the participants for this study, I hoped to learn more about the pressures teachers faced as workers in this neoliberal era and to learn *how*, in their work with poor students and students of color, they navigated the deficit thinking so prevalent in urban schools. Thus, I sought out people whose job it was to teach urban youth, and who came into contact with these discourses of blame; I wanted to talk to educators who worked in schools that they and others deemed “urban.” I was not so concerned with how long a teacher had taught in an urban school, or if they were currently teaching, because I wanted to explore how deficit discourse worked with different kinds of educators in different urban spaces. However, because I want to take teachers seriously and highlight their voices and labor, I also need to consider what I risk in calling *both* a 10-year veteran and a TFAer who was in the classroom for two years “urban teachers.” Do I want to highlight the labor and voices of both of these teachers in the same way? Are both *worthy* of the teacher title? Teachers in these different sites—TFA and Project Voice—and different geographical locations across the U.S. took up these blaming discourses in actually pretty similar ways. While I think it is a strength of the study to show the power and prevalence of these discourses, and to show that all kinds of teachers have to grapple with them, I do not want that fact that I examine and juxtapose different kinds of teachers across multiple sites to mean that these teachers are somehow equal or the same.

Descriptions of Individual Participants

Christine. Christine was the fourth grade teacher at the K-8 Garber School when our research team met her. As we began seeking students and teachers to work with on the Project Voice study, a professor of education who was not part of the project recommend we talk to Christine and two other teachers who worked closely with Christine on the third floor of Garber. This three-person “dream team,” as they were called by our colleague, had stood out to him as a group who might be interested in collaborating on our digital film project. Christine is a white, middle-aged woman who came to teaching more recently in life. She and her husband live in Upstate City near the school, and she called herself a “city girl.” She teased her colleague, Jack, for living out in the “boonies.” Christine was often critical of the demands put on teachers, but she also worried that “good families” leaving the district was a source of her difficulties. She said she regularly discussed her own teaching with Maddie, another Project Voice participant, and said she looked to Maddie as her mentor teacher. Christine often seemed reflective of her practice in our focus groups, as well. When I interviewed her at her new school, after Garber had closed, she felt settled and seemed happy to be working with other teachers:

When I came here, this was my first time really being on a grade-level team. It was a little weird last year, just getting my footing—new school, new people, new kids, and new everything. This year is much better. We’re a pretty cohesive team. I think there are differences how we feel about different things, but I think we support each other well and we collaborate well. It’s a matter of deciding what you need to hold onto and what you need to let go of. I remember at the end of last year thinking, “I’m going to do things differently next year.”

Jack. Jack is a middle-aged white man who was teaching fifth grade at Garber School when we began Project Voice. He is married with young children, and he lives in a rural area outside of the city. When the whole research-teaching team had a cookout to celebrate the end of the school year at Jack's house, I could tell he was proud of his country home and happy to have a creek and lots of space for his children to play. Jack was also a big sports fan who discussed college basketball news with his students and often told them stories from when he had played soccer in Brazil. Jack said on a few occasions that he wanted to make school fun for his students because it had not been fun for him. I appreciated that Jack had a sense that school could—and should—be done differently, but we did not always agree with how that might look. While he wanted to make school “fun,” he also said, for instance, that he felt he had to “drink the Kool-Aid” and go along with an inclusion model, but he did not really believe in it. He also had taught in an outdoor, alternative education program for youth who Jack called “juvenile delinquents,” and he talked fondly about roughing it with these young people. He liked the program's break-them-down, build-them-back-up approach. In having to “deal with” these kids, Jack felt well-equipped to teach in Upstate City and said this program was where he “learned how to deal with behavior, better than [he] could ever have learned anywhere else.”

Maddie. Maddie is a young, black woman who often identified as bi-racial but also referred to herself as black. She was teaching sixth grade at Garber when the Project Voice research team began meeting with her. Maddie seems like a very energetic, busy person involved in multiple activities. She is in the Air Force, and she was taking graduate classes in the evenings throughout the duration of the project. She talked about working out daily, she went to church every week, she seemed to have a lot of friends who she saw regularly and with whom she took trips, and she was close with her family. Maddie is from Upstate City, but she had taught in the

South prior to moving back and teaching in town. She spoke longingly of her school in Florida for having things like “behavior specialists” and “reading specialists”; she felt more supported there than she did in the Upstate School District, and particularly at Garber School where she felt teachers had been “thrown in” with “nothing.” Although she perceived a lack of support, she did not want to let that stop her from giving teaching her all: “I go into anything that I do 100 percent.” Her students noticed that Maddie gave them her all. Students seemed to like her because she kept it “real” with them. She said she was strict with and hard on her students, but her students appreciated that she explained *why* she was strict with them. Maddie was upset when her students behaved in ways that did not measure up to middle class norms, and she often constructed her students as deficient. However, her desire for her students to assimilate was often seemed rooted in a concern for how dominant society would perceive them and treat them if they did not. I discuss this more in Chapter Four.

Ben. Ben is a white, middle-aged man who had been a young TFA teacher when the corps first started. He has remained in education and currently teaches in Los Angeles. He is now openly critical of TFA and is active in the teacher union and in social and environmental justice movements. He explained that his critical views are different than many other corps members, in part, because he was an *early* corps member:

I mean, it was the first year of Teach For America when I started in 1990. And so, Teach For America was very different then. They didn't have... They were really going by the seat of their pants. It was not the kind of corporate monster that it is now. They weren't really putting out any coherent thing, though, to core members about unions or about veteran teachers, or about test scores or about...it just wasn't there. The organization

wasn't developed enough. There was definitely an elitist feel to it, and a *white* elitist feel to it, but not in anywhere *near* the coherent or strong fashion it is today.

Ben also believed that staying in the classroom has given him a critical perspective that other TFA teachers who leave teaching might not get:

But probably the most important thing was just staying in teaching. It's just hard to... I just think it's pretty hard... Like, a lot of the Teach For America stuff that's promoted by the organization—it's pretty hard to swallow if you stay in teaching. I know there are people who do; I know that, so I'm not saying anybody who stays in teaching like *gets* the bullshit that Teach For America promotes, but I think if you're day-to-day in the classroom at an urban school in a public system where it's not, you know, corporate-funded charters with a bunch of...you know, that's catering specifically to higher performing kids with a lot of corporate money. If you're in that environment, and you stay in that environment, it's just pretty hard to buy the TFA line.

Nisha. Nisha is a young, first-generation Indian-American woman who grew up in California. She learned about TFA while she was an undergrad at the University of Southern California, and she saw TFA as an extension of her volunteer work at the campus volunteer center. Nisha was a TFA teacher for two years in a public middle school in Los Angeles, and she had most recently worked at The Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) in Washington D.C. When I interviewed her, Nisha was completing her master's degree in public policy. At OSSE, she had served as a placement coordinator in the Department of Special Education, and she worked to curb the practice of placing students with disabilities into more restrictive environments, often into non-public, segregated schools that were just for students with disabilities. She said she worked primarily with charter schools in D.C. because their

focus started becoming to just push kids more restrictive, more restrictive because they weren't getting the supports from the regular schools. I would meet with IEP teams and I would provide a state recommendation as a representative of the government saying, "Based on what we see here, I think Johnny should not be moving to a more restrictive environment. I think there are more strategies we can try in this setting." I almost did a consulting role, where I would observe some of the students, observe the teachers, see what the problem was.

Nisha did not always have an interest in special education issues, but she had "ticked a box" when she filled out her TFA application that she would be willing to teach not only math and history, but also special education. At her middle school, she taught general education history courses in inclusive classrooms, as well as sixth, seventh and eighth grade history in self-contained special education classrooms. While Nisha was not critical of TFA (and excitedly talked about attending TFA alumni conventions with "celebrities" and "amazing guest speakers" like Arne Duncan, for example), she worried that, in the quest to quantitatively assess teachers and students, students are being incorrectly labeled as having disabilities: "Well, let's just put them in Special Ed. and forget about them."

Erica. Erica is a young, white woman who completed her TFA tenure in Chicago, before beginning a master's degree in public administration. She worked at a charter school that served mainly Latin@ students in her first year and a charter school that served mainly black students in her second year. While teaching for TFA, she also earned her master's in teaching at a program tailored specifically for TFA corps members. Erica described herself as a "numbers person." I describe this more in Chapter Five, but she spent a lot of time talking about the metrics of measuring students' progress and hence, in her view, teacher impact. She worried that because

the metrics tested students each spring—rather than fall and spring—some of the impact of the teacher was lost due to the “summer slip.” Erica had faith in testing and simultaneously critiqued it. Her one-year contract was not renewed at her first school because of her students’ test scores, so TFA had to help negotiate a new placement for her, and she had to reconcile some of her beliefs around testing and teacher effectiveness. I got the sense that Erica was a confident, articulate person. Despite that I did not always agree with her perspective—like her confidence in using testing to evaluate teachers—I appreciated that her confidence also extended to things like her belief that her Latin@ students should be able to speak Spanish and learn about Latin@ culture and history, for example.

Emily. Emily and I spoke once on the phone for a good amount of time before meeting twice in person in her Manhattan apartment that she shared with a roommate. Emily is a young white woman, originally from the Midwest. She had been a TFA teacher for two years in Brooklyn and had remained in education. When I interviewed her, she was teaching at Harlem Success Academy, the first of a network of charter schools founded by Eva Moskowitz. (“Leaders”, n.d.) From the beginning, Emily had seemed wary of my research intentions, and she asked if I was evaluating how effective TFA was in the classroom. She said she did not want to “contribute” to a critique of TFA and seemed aware that TFA had received some negative press. I explained that I was interested in her experiences with and perspectives on teaching in an urban school as a TFAer. I told her, “There are parts I like, and there are parts I’m critical of, but my intent is not to just bash it.” Out of all of my participants, Emily seemed like one of the most loyal to TFA, and she, like Nisha, talked enthusiastically about attending TFA alumni summits. She said her TFA network was what allowed her to find out about jobs at various charter schools, and she saw the teachers at these schools as especially caring and dedicated. She also did not

seem to wrestle as much as other participants with deficit thinking. Rather, she more or less accepted deficit assumptions about her urban students, which I discuss further in Chapter Four.

Jonathon. Jonathon began his teaching stint as a TFA teacher in a large urban district in Houston. He stayed teaching at his school for three years past his TFA commitment, for a total of five years. Jonathon is a young, black man who was attracted to TFA because he wanted to do “some kind of service, post-graduation.” He had some limited experience with tutoring, but he knew he liked working with kids. Jonathon and I talked over Skype and email several times, so I never got to meet him “in person.” However, I felt like our interviews were rich, and I found myself feeling like I knew Jonathon and that I liked him, even when I did not fully share his views. Jonathon thought developing relationships with his students and their families was central to his teaching, which I discuss more fully in Chapter Six. Jonathon taught math, science and social studies to fifth graders. Although he was an excellent teacher—he received the “Teacher of the Year” award in his district during his last year there—he left teaching and was in the process of becoming a minister when we met. He had already earned a master’s degree in curriculum and instruction, and he was about to start another master’s program in ministry. He was not sure if he wanted to be a minister of a church, or whether he could combine his interests in ministry and education in some way: “In the church I belong to, the Presbyterian Church, teaching is a very big aspect of ministry. Hopefully the skills that I’ve developed and the passion I have for teaching will play well in that venture.”

Kelly. Kelly, a young, white woman, had just started a new job as Assessment Coordinator at a charter school in New York City when I met with her. She described her job as

looking at what assessments are out there, what can be used effectively. Of course, you have the state tests that you have to give, but on top of that—what can we implement in this school that is going to give us great information to help teacher instruction?

As a public policy student in college, Kelly took an education policy class that involved some after-school tutoring in an urban elementary school. After graduation, she joined TFA, taught for TFA in Atlanta for two years, and then left teaching because she was not interested in pursuing the graduate work needed to keep her job and was not sure she wanted to stay in education long term. Kelly was a bit critical of the brief training TFA offered its members before “they throw you into a classroom.” She worked in a creative industry during the time she was away from education, which she said was great because she was “desperate for something else.” Because she missed the classroom, however, she decided to return to teaching, with the help of her TFA status and network:

I thought, “Okay, well maybe I should give it another shot.” So it was on a whim, after a vacation, actually, with a bunch of friends who did TFA. On a whim I was like, “You know, I’m going to apply and see what happens.” So I applied to Uncommon Schools in July. I applied on a Monday, got an email on Tuesday saying I had skipped the phone interview and they wanted to bring me into a school. On Thursday I was brought into a school, and on Monday I was hired, and then I started that Wednesday. It was because they were looking for a teacher, and I fit and whatever, so they brought me in. I don’t think at that point, even, if I had known more about this school and how things ran, that I would have said “no” because I was just like, “Yes, I want to get back into the classroom.” I didn’t know it would be so vastly different.

Kelly ended up staying in this position for only one year before becoming an Assessment Coordinator at her current school, partly because of the long hours expected of her and the school's regimented discipline system.

Anne. Anne is a young, white woman who I interviewed only once. She taught science and social studies in Arizona as a TFA corps member. She grew up in Ohio where her mother was a teacher and her father was involved in education funding issues. Anne had studied political science in college and was attracted to TFA because she saw its mission as trying to fix the achievement gap. Although she had gone to what she called a good school district, she said that it was a rural, low-income area:

I saw the opportunity that despite coming from a low-income background, that education can give you so many opportunities. The idea that...children aren't getting those opportunities essentially just because of the community they live in and the income of their parents doesn't seem... It didn't seem fair to me, and I really felt like I wanted to do something with education policy.

Anne felt that she learned a lot from her TFA experience and that it gave her more “legitimacy” than “someone who graduated [from] some college with a political science degree—which is what I had—and goes and works for a government somewhere and tries to do something.” However, she also noted that veteran teachers might “have trouble with, or wouldn't necessarily agree with” this claim to legitimacy: “I don't think I, in any way, shape or form, have the legitimacy or authority that someone who's taught their entire career in a classroom has.” In addition, Anne said she “absolutely” learned a lot from her veteran colleagues. Anne also felt conflicted about leaving teaching after two years, especially since her school's teacher turnover

rate was so high, but she defended TFA's two-year term by saying, "In this school, two years can be a pretty long time."

Andre. I thoroughly enjoyed my interviews with Andre, in large part, I think, because we had a mutual friend that allowed each of us to have some insight into what the other's politics would be. In other words, the mutual knowing of this colleague gave us (me, at least, but I think Andre, too) a sense before we even met that we might share perspectives on things like social justice education, for instance. When we emailed back and forth prior to meeting in person, Andre told me that he was critical of TFA, but he was also critical of people who were critical of TFA, which I thought was smart and funny. I probably shared more about my research project and my thoughts on TFA with him than I did with other participants. Andre and I arranged to meet in Boston, and I interviewed him once by himself and once with his girlfriend, Pritika, who also was a TFA alum. Andre is a young, black man who taught for TFA in the Southeast U.S. We talked mainly about his first year teaching fifth and sixth grade math in a KIPP public charter school in a Southeast city, but he also told me about working in a second school for two additional years—one that was near his first placement but "not quite urban." Andre said that about 50 percent of the teachers at the KIPP school were TFA alumni, but he was one of only three first-year TFA teachers when he taught there. He and one other first-year TFAer were asked to leave after the first year because, as Andre said, "We weren't good enough." He explained that although his test scores were better or similar to all of the first year TFA teachers, they were worse than almost all of the KIPP teachers who had taught for a few years. He laughingly said, "My scores—I looked at them because they have all these nice, colorful charts to show me how not-so-good I was compared to my colleagues at KIPP." Andre thought that his

good relationship with TFA directors, as well as his identity as a man of color from the area, helped him to stay on with TFA in another school:

Normally with Teach For America, if your school district does not renew your contract, Teach For America says, “You must have been really bad, and *we* won't renew your contract.” But because Teach For America... I don't know. Maybe it was because they saw that KIPP didn't support me properly. Maybe because I was a black guy from the city, and it would look really bad for me to be kicked out of KIPP and Teach For America all in the same year. Maybe because the executive director... We were pretty good friends.

Pritika. Pritika is a young, Indian-American woman who was a TFA alumna. She grew up in the Bronx, “in the low, stereotypical urban school.” She had just graduated from a master’s program in international education policy when we met. She met Andre while also teaching for TFA in the Southeast, although she described her school as more rural. Because I told her I was interested in her urban education experiences, she talked mainly about her third year as a teacher—the year previous to our interview—where she worked at a public charter school in Washington D.C. I noticed Pritika often engaged in what I called “proper reform speak.” Perhaps it was because she was fresh out of a master’s program on education policy, but the language of accountability, data-driven pursuits, and other kinds of reform “catch phrases” worked their way into her talk, and she used these terms in a matter-of-fact manner. She seemed confident that she knew what the problems were in public education, and although she thought “charter schools are great” and they “pick up the slack” where traditional public schools ostensibly do not, she also recognized similarities across them:

I saw the exact same pitfalls that existed in even my school that I went to and other public schools. Poor administration, lack of real school culture that could engage students and motivate students. Very low parental engagement. The achievement rate was not as high as one would expect this top-of-the-line charter school to have.

Leah. Leah is a young, white woman from what she called a working-class background. When I first met Leah, she had just graduated from college. She had worked as a campus recruiter for TFA during her senior year. In the course of our first interview, I learned that she was a women's studies major, like I had been. Similar to my interactions with Andre, this knowledge allowed for us to have some sense of a shared perspective, at least on some things. She told me that she was critical of the TFA application process because of its narrow definition of "leader" and what counted as leadership experience. She recognized—partly, I think, informed by her working-class background and also by her women's studies background—that students who have to work during college might not have the opportunity to hold all of the leadership positions that TFA traditionally looked for. I was impressed that she brought up her concern with TFA leaders and that she helped change the application process to honor students' work experiences. However, she also said that women's studies was "a huge part" of why she wanted to join TFA:

Well, really I was attracted to the whole... Well, it's confusing because I know the criticisms, and I don't want to trip myself up, but like I'm really interested in the idea of creating an environment where there's an equal playing field in education, not depending on where you live...Because we've always studied like, local...politics of location, and like the fact that where you're from can determine where you're going to end up, and I

like their whole mission of leveling that, but I also find it really interesting—their whole idea of changing the teaching profession.

Leah understood some of the criticisms against TFA. She noted, for instance, that “Education schools really don’t like Teach For America!” I interviewed Leah again when she was working for TFA in New York City as a higher-level recruiter, but she planned to join the corps as an actual teacher in the near future. She mentioned another critique of TFA that her women’s studies professors had pointed out to her—that TFA employed a kind of white savior model. But Leah believed TFA had started doing a better job recruiting teachers of color:

Leah: Well, that’s why a lot of women’s studies professors were like, “Don’t do it!” And I was like, “Why??” Like, “I don’t understand!”

Heidi: Yeah.

Leah: They’re like, “It’s the great white hope!” And I was like, “No it’s not!” I could see it—at first—because it was all like rich kids from Ivy League schools. Not anymore.

I believe Leah might appear less often than other participants in the final dissertation because, while the transcripts of interviews with her were rich and useful to me, she was not yet teaching. She is important to include as a participant because the early interviews with her taught me about TFA; she had had experiences in the classroom, in TFA training, and in recruitment and hiring, and she had a lot to say about urban schools, urban youth, and the TFA teacher’s role.

Data Collection

My primary method of data collection was in-depth, semi-structured interviewing. This approach meant that I came to the interviews with a guiding set of questions, but I had flexibility in exploring new themes as the participants talked. Semi-structured interviews require that the researcher be “open to following the leads of informants and probing into areas that arise during

interview interactions” (Hatch, 2002, p. 94). In using probes and asking follow up questions, I aimed to draw out “depth and detail” about urban teachers’ perspectives (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 4). I conducted mainly one-on-one interviews, but teachers from Project Voice also took part in weekly focus groups during the course of the project, each focus group lasting about an hour. Teachers from both TFA and Project Voice were the main participants, and their talk is the primary data. However, Project Voice students also provided secondary data, as students often talked about how they thought their teachers saw them and how they understood some of the pressures that their teachers were under. Students’ stories also served as entry points for interviewing teachers. These secondary data came from formal focus groups with students, interviews students conducted with one another, informal conversations with students on our Project Voice “limo bus” and on field trips, classroom observations, and working sessions when I helped students plan, film and edit their Project Voice movies. As part of Project Voice Sari Biklen and I also interviewed principals at Garber, but I did not include these interview transcripts in my final data set for analysis. Secondary data also came from doing participant observation in two TFA alumni’s classrooms, casual conversation with those TFA alumni, participant observation of a campus information session by another recruiter, and observations of other public speeches, research talks, and panels by TFA alumni and officials. I also conducted document analysis, examining TFA recruiting materials, a TFA “insider” print publication, TFA Summer Institute training manuals, and the TFA website, as well as Project Voice student films.

I already described briefly how the Project Voice research team connected with Christine, Jack and Maddie. Before we started working with students, we spent time getting to know the three teachers in meetings that were part planning meetings, part focus groups. Sari Biklen, co-PI Michael Schoonmaker and I, sometimes along with other graduate student researchers, visited

with the teachers at Garber, often meeting in Maddie's classroom before the school day started. We shared our aims for the project and also learned from them what their students might like to do and how the project could fit in with their curricular goals. The teachers also helped us in sending parental permission slips home that the IRB required for students to take part in the project, as well as assent forms for the students.

Teachers from Project Voice were incredibly generous with their time. Members of our research team met with them almost every Friday morning before school for one and a half years (during the school year). Each meeting usually lasted about an hour. After Garber School closed, we remained in contact with these three teachers, even though our Project Voice work continued mainly through interactions with the students. For this dissertation project, I interviewed each of the teachers again after Project Voice fieldwork ended. All of these interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed, which I describe more in the following data analysis section.

To enroll TFA teachers in my study, I used a snowball sampling technique (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) to ask participants to recommend other potential participants. Early participants were friends of friends. A friend of mine from college heard I was studying TFA teachers in urban schools, and she recommended I contact Emily, for instance, a friend from her childhood. After every interview I asked participants if it would be okay for me to contact them again with follow-up questions or potential additional interviews, and I asked if they knew any other TFAers who might be interested in talking to me. When I e-mailed potential participants, I did not identify who had recommended them so as not to disclose the recommender's participation in the study, although sometimes the recommender gave them a heads-up. Below is the IRB-approved language that I sent to potential research participants:

I am contacting you because I am studying Teach For America teachers' experiences in urban schools as part of my dissertation research, and I am looking for TFA teachers who would like to be interviewed for this research project. You were recommended to me as someone who has taught as a TFA teacher in an urban school, and I was wondering if you would like to meet for an interview to share your perspectives and experiences as an urban TFA teacher. It would probably take about an hour, and we could decide on a meeting place together. If you are interested, please contact me, Heidi Pitzer, at hkpitzer@syr.edu for further information.

As I continued in my doctoral program, I met more colleagues who, upon hearing that I was interested in talking to TFA teachers, recommended additional people who I could contact. In my IRB, I was also approved to recruit participants through online messages on TFA blogs, but I decided the snowball sampling technique had yielded enough participants.

In starting my sampling with acquaintances and then letting it “snowball” out from there, I may have risked talking to one “kind” of TFA teacher. I talked to a few graduate students fresh out of TFA, for example. However, I found that I ended up with a pretty diverse pool in terms of current and past teachers, years of teaching, and critical and enthusiastic views on TFA. I did not anticipate or seek different “types” of teachers before interviewing them. Nor did I try to predetermine what their views on urban students or TFA might be. Rather, I was interested in talking to any TFAer who had worked in an urban setting to learn *how* they navigated the discourses that shaped their teaching and their perspectives.

While it was relatively easy in terms of logistics to meet with teachers from Project Voice, interviewing TFA teachers was sometimes more difficult. Project Voice teachers were invested in the project, and they seemed to like being part of the research team and working with

people from the University. The grant also allowed us to pay each teacher \$1000 and provide each teacher with a digital video camera, microphones, and some tech support. Even after the official fieldwork with their students ended, the teachers seemed happy to make time to talk to me in their new positions at new schools within the district. Garber School was close to my apartment, so I could walk to meetings easily. I also had a car, so when the three teachers moved to new schools, getting around to their buildings was not difficult.

TFA teacher participants were much more geographically spread out and were not personally involved in a project with me. Some, as I mentioned, were a bit hesitant to talk to me at first, I think partly because of the increasing negative, critical attention TFA attracted. However, each participant talked to me for over an hour during each interview, except my interview with Ben which was about 45 minutes, and they seemed interested in sharing their teaching experiences in an open-ended manner. Although Upstate City does not have a TFA contingent, I was able to interview four TFA alumni in Upstate City who were currently living there. For other participants, I had to travel to meet them or interview using Skype. I interviewed three participants in New York City and two participants in Boston. I met the teachers in cafes, coffee shops, and restaurants that were quiet so I could offer to buy them coffee or a snack to thank them for their time. Only my interviews with Emily and Kelly were done in a non-public place; Emily invited me to her apartment twice, and I interviewed Kelly at her school. To interview Ben and Jonathon, I used Skype because Ben lived in Los Angeles and Jonathon lived in Houston. While qualitative interviews done through Skype are certainly different than face-to-face interviews, they allow for many of the same benefits as traditional qualitative interviews (Hanna, 2012). In fact, I found that my first Skype interview with Jonathon inadvertently allowed space for some emotions to come out that might have been more awkward in person, or

that might have not happened at all in person. Jonathon thought back to when he was leaving teaching and a former student cried thanking him for being her teacher. The video had actually failed during parts of the interview and we only had the audio working at that point. Jonathon said, “Even now, it’s eliciting some emotions over here. It’s a good thing you can’t see me on the video,” and I said that I felt that I might cry, too!

As I previously noted, I used a semi-structured approach for interviews and asked open-ended questions that allowed the participants some power to lead the conversation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I wanted to hear about their experiences in urban schools, broadly—their challenges and their delights, their perspectives on students, their ideas about curriculum, their thoughts on administrators and other teachers. More specifically, I also wanted to know what the Urban meant to them and how they constructed their work within urban public education; I wanted to get at the complexity of their work. The following are some of the sample interview questions I developed prior to conducting interviews:

- How did you come to teach in an urban school?
- What does an “urban school” mean to you?
- What is your school like?
- What do your friends and families say about your job?
- Can you tell me about what you like about your job?
- What are some of the struggles you have faced as an urban teacher?
- What attracted you to teaching/TFA?
- How did you train to become a teacher?
- How does your school support teachers (or not)?

I asked all of these questions or some version of them to all of the participants. They were broad enough that teachers had space to answer in an unrestricted way, but I also tried to be strategic because I wanted them to talk about their concerns and the struggles they faced in their work.

As I collected more data, I was able to draw upon previous interviews to better interact with teachers in later interviews. I said to some teachers, for instance, that teachers in other interviews had talked about school “culture,” but I thought that they sometimes really meant a school discipline system. Using previous interviews as a jumping off point, I was able to ask them if that was how they also saw culture, or if they understood it as something different. I tried to ask follow up questions when teachers said something I was interested in hearing more about or when they said something unclear. Sometimes teachers talked in generalities, so I often asked teachers, “Can you give me an example?” or I said, “I love stories. Can you think of a particular time when that happened?” Stories about particular past experiences often yielded the most rich, complicated data. People are not generally used to the qualitative interview setting, especially the researcher’s role in probing further with questions like, “What do you mean by that?” As a new researcher, I also was not always used to asking probes, but I concentrated on getting better. I often took notes on points that I wanted teachers to elaborate on so I could return to them later, without interrupting them. Reading over early transcripts, I often noticed instances where I wished I had asked a follow-up question. I also realized that I sometimes asked double questions; I did not leave enough silence time at the end of a question before tacking on another. However, this was something that I was able to improve upon because I analyzed transcripts throughout the data collection process.

Data Analysis

“Findings and ideas about findings emerge together” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 159)

“Analysis and data collection occurred in a pulsating fashion...” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 73).

My data analysis was not the boxed-off step that I had imagined it to be, early on in the dissertation process; it did not occur linearly and neatly after data collection and before the writing stage. Instead, I conducted analysis continuously throughout the entire data collection process. All interviews and focus groups were recorded using a digital audio recorder, transcribed, and corrected. I transcribed about half of all interviews myself, and the others were transcribed either by an online transcription service that I paid for with my own funds, or by colleagues who were paid by the grant from Project Voice. Some student focus groups were filmed, and I tended to transcribe these because of the number of different students speaking who needed to be identified. I used Express Scribe to help me transcribe, a free software download that let me slow down recordings and easily rewind and pause recordings. I did all of the transcribing for my early interviews with TFA teachers, which was a time-consuming process, but it allowed me to revisit the interview scene, in a sense—and it allowed me to be a perfectionist and get every word from my participant just right. As I interviewed more TFA teachers, and as I took on a new, demanding graduate assistantship with Say Yes to Education, I decided that spending money on transcription services was worth the time it would save me. When others transcribed the data—either the online service or a colleague—I always checked and corrected the transcript carefully by listening to the recording and making changes throughout the document. Changes included small things like the punctuation of a sentence, as well as larger things like changing “Texas” to “texts!”

As I transcribed and corrected focus group and interview data, I wrote “observer’s comments” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 163) or OCs right within the transcribed document. I

made the typeface of OCs green so I could easily find the comments later. I also started each OC with “OC:” so that later I could use Microsoft Word’s “find” function to locate my comments easily. OCs were an important initial step in the analysis for me. I used OCs to note a participant’s tone, to note a similarity or difference between the current interview and what a participant in an earlier interview had said, to speculate on whether a participant was using coded language, and in a variety of other ways. Basically, any time I had an “A-ha!” moment when I felt I was starting to understand something, I wrote an OC. It was freeing to try out ideas in a less-than-perfect written form.

In addition to OCs, I also noted codes to start sorting my interview data. As I transcribed and corrected transcriptions, I typed these developing codes right within the Word document, too, using purple font, capital letters and an asterisk so I could find them easily later. Some codes were lower level codes that referred to the content of the participant’s talk, like “special education” or “student behavior.” Sometimes I used participants’ own words to name a code, like “It’s crazy,” for instance, as Jack continually described his experience in his urban district as, “It’s crazy” “nuts” and “chaotic.” Other codes were more involved. I developed the code “the good teacher,” for example, for times when I interpreted a teacher as constructing what it meant to be a good teacher, or as discussing who was allowed to be a good teacher (and who was not), even though the teachers did not usually define this identity or concept directly. When I was ready to expand upon a particularly interesting OC or felt ready to “try out” a code in a more developed way, I wrote research memos. Some of these memos I used to work out ideas for myself, and others I shared with Sari or discussed with colleagues. I wrote memos mainly at the end of data collection, when I could look across all of the data, but I also used memos as a way

to summarize some of the emerging themes from interviews with just one particular participant. These written memos then became part of my data.

In regards to my data analysis, the sharing of research memos with Sari and other colleagues helps to enhance trustworthiness. In written memos, I included large excerpts of interview transcripts and reflected on what I thought the data meant. I tried out developing codes, and I questioned other possible interpretations. Sari read these memos consistently, but I also shared some memos with other doctoral students. While no one comes to data “neutrally,” having others review data passages helped to guard against my own subjectivity and my own outlook over-determining the meaning of data. I had to consider other interpretations which sometimes shifted my own initial interpretations.

About half way through my data collection, I was feeling a little disorganized and overwhelmed with the amount of data I had. I decided to purchase ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data analysis software program. Despite that I had attended a training workshop on using NVivo, another qualitative research software package, I decided to use ATLAS.ti because of its lower cost and because I had other colleagues who had used it for their research projects and who could help me troubleshoot. Although I am sure I did not use ATLAS.ti to the full extent that I could have, it helped me to organize my data and my different layers of analysis. I uploaded all transcripts and memos into ATLAS.ti, and I re-coded those documents which I had started to code using only Microsoft Word. All transcripts from that point on, I coded directly in ATLAS.ti. At times I felt too caught up in one interview and would forget about previous ones, but the software helped me to build my coding structure across all of the data and to more easily see connections across different interviews. It also allowed me to see which codes I used most often, and it made it easier to code one chunk of an interview with multiple coding categories.

Sometimes I also felt concerned that I was focusing on the words of one teacher at the expense of another. When I saw Erica's name multiple times in an ATLAS.ti report for the "personal school talk" code, for instance, and fewer instances of Ben or Leah, I worried that I was not analyzing all the interview transcripts in equal depth. I reread transcripts, memos and reports to guard against favoring some interviews over others, and also to ensure that a theme or code did, indeed, exist *across* the data. However, I also realized that not all participants are going to say equally rich, meaningful things. Again, a multi-sited approach does not necessitate that I do equal things in each "site" or with each participant, but that I can look across the data "regardless of the variability of the quality and accessibility of that research" (Marcus, 1995, p. 100).

I read over all of the data again and again to refine codes, change codes, and add new ones. Sometimes I knew I had come across a large idea or theme that would probably need to be broken down more. For example, I developed the code "students as lack" to mark the instances when teachers talked about their students as deficient in some way. Within that broad code, I knew there were important distinctions—what students lacked, who was seen as responsible for that lack, whether the lack was "true" or an assumption, my own reactions to hearing different teachers talk about the students as lacking, and so on—but it was overwhelming to try to think about all those differences and nuances at once. However, ATLAS.ti allowed me to go back and generate a report of all the instances I had coded as "students as lack" to be able to read through this data all together. I was able to refine this rough code into smaller codes like "immature," "academically lacking," and "behavior problem." While it is significant that teachers talked about their students *as* deficient as much as they did—no matter how they were deficient—I think one of the most interesting parts of my study was teasing apart the different ways teachers

constructed students as lacking and figuring out how deficit discourse did or did not shape this view.

Theoretical Framework for Analysis

“A voice can speak (and should), to be sure, but only within a historically contingent time and space, and within the established confines of institutions, language and power” (Baez, 2002, p. 51).

This research employed critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Luke, 2002; Rapley, 2007), allowing me to examine “the rules and practices that produced meaningful statements” (Hall, 2003, p. 44), as well as an interpretive approach that centered teachers’ subjectivities and their meaning-making processes, so I could hold the discursive frames and teachers’ subjectivities in tension. My analysis of data was also guided by symbolic interaction (Blumer, 1969; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Teachers’ talk does not naturally *mean* any particular thing automatically, but meaning is *made* from teachers’ talk, both through their interpretations of and relations to the broader social world, and through the meanings that *I* interpreted from their particular interactions with me. My theoretical framing of teachers’ talk being produced through and against discourse—paying particular attention to neoliberal and deficit discourse—was important for analysis because without it, I simply could have blamed individual teachers for their views on students and other urban teachers. In Bettie’s (2003) work on girls and class identity, a central methodological point of interest is her analysis and interpretation of the girls’ constructions of classed identities, in spite of a lack of obvious or direct “class talk.” In other words, her *analytical frame* becomes an important methodological element precisely because without it, her central findings about classed identity constructions would have remained invisible. If participants’ voices had somehow simply “stood for themselves” (although they never actually

do) and Bettie had not so thoroughly analyzed their words and practices in terms of available discourses, she easily could have found no traces of classed identity.

CDA needs more than linguistic analysis—it needs social theory to understand its effects or “consequences”: “To reiterate, the actual power of the text, its material and discourse consequences, can only be described by reference to broader social theoretic models of the world” (Luke, 2002, p. 102). So, analyzing discourse (and the absence of certain discourses) is not only a linguistic matter:

Discourse, Foucault argues, constructs the topic. It defines and produces the objects of our knowledge. It governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others. (Hall, 2003, p. 44)

These regimes of meaning (Foucault, 1980), then, come with ideological constructs *and* material effects. In analyzing teachers’ talk, I kept in tension my desire to center teachers’ talk and experiences on the one hand, with the call of poststructuralist researchers like Orner (1992) to resist the notion of a stable voice that relies on a coherent, essentialized subject, on the other hand: “We must refuse the tendency to attribute ‘authenticity’ to the people’s voices when they speak from their own experience of difference, as if their speech were transparent and their understanding of their experience unchanging” (Orner, 1992, p. 86).

Tanggaard (2009) argues that qualitative methods can illuminate or “give voice” to discourses: “[A] thoroughly dialogical interview can give voice to dissenting discourses within the specific interview settings that are embedded within and reflect broader diversity within institutional talk and practices” (p. 1499). This idea that the interview setting not only gives voice to the individual *participant* but also has the potential to expose wider discourses appealed

to me. It helped remind me that while I had found deficit and neoliberal discourses to be central forces in teachers' work, these discourses did not fully determine teachers' perspectives or fully encase them. Instead, I needed to analyze how other discourses—and cracks in dominant discourses—also emerged in interviews with teachers. I recognized teachers making meaning of their work with students through a developmental model or discourse, for instance—not only deficit or neoliberal discourses.

I enacted this theoretical framing in my analysis by, for instance, being on the lookout for coded language. Teachers' deficit views of students did not come through in directly racist comments. Rather, as I discuss in Chapter Four, I had to recognize how phrases like “these kids” and “good families” and “ridiculous families” held raced and classed meanings, within a colorblind discourse. I paid attention to how these kinds of phrases held inexplicit but also stable, taken-for-granted meanings for teachers. In using a CDA approach, I also had to revise initial codes to account for how teachers navigate discourse, even as discourse “constructs the topic” (Hall, 2003, p. 44). I noticed that teachers were critical of the pressures of efficiency and lack of time, even as efficiency seemed to be a commonsensical way to think and talk about school. In other words, as I describe in Chapter Five, even though efficiency and productivity have become “standard” or “universal” ways to think about time (Zhou, 2012, p. 6), I noticed that teachers' critiques offered cracks or “dissenting” voices (Tinggaard, 2009, p. 1499) to this dominant discourse. Throughout my discussions of the data in the following three chapters, I make visible more of my analytic process.

Writing Voice

“The act of expression ... clarifies what is to be expressed. When acting meaningfully, we begin with a subjectively felt impetus to express something that we understand only implicitly. We

cannot be sure what it is we want to express until we are actually in the process of expressing it.” (Carspecken, 1996, p. 123)

Part of representing teachers’ voices means writing and making their stories accessible to readers (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Writing styles or “narrative conventions” are another kind of discourse that shapes the voices of those we research and shapes how they will be heard by others (Lather, 2009; Van Maanen, 1988). Van Maanen (1988) argues that writing intimately influences research: “An ethnography is a means of representation. Yet any claim to directly link fieldwork (and the immediacy of experience) to the ethnography itself, unmediated or untransformed by narrative conventions, will not hold” (p. 7). We are caught in a paradox as researchers: Our writing or representation choices color (or even produce) what we learn in the field, color our findings; but, we cannot make the social world and research participants’ perspectives of the world available without representation: “Culture is not itself visible, but is made visible only through its representation” (p. 3).

With an intended reading audience in mind, a researcher wants her participants’ “voice” to be heard in a particular way. Critical race methodology in education, for example—specifically counter-storytelling—uses creative writing conventions to give voice, in ways that could possibly disrupt the usual, racist dominant discourses (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Researchers should use writing strategies purposefully to guide readers: “In this sense, the narrative tricks the ethnographer uses to claim truth are no less sophisticated than those used by the novelist to claim fiction. Writing of either sort must not mystify or frustrate the audience an author wishes to reach” (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 25). However, to frustrate the reader is precisely Lather’s (2009) goal. Against an easy, “empathetic” writing/reading, Lather calls for a “methodology of getting lost and an uneasiness in the quest for a less comfortable social science”

(p. 23). Drawing on work by Ellsworth and AIDS activist Crimp, Lather says that empathy can work to reproduce sameness and thus erase difference (p. 19). Discussing her “uncooperative” book, *Troubling the Angels*, Lather says she writes in a form that she hopes disrupts empathy: “Refusing the liberal embrace of empathy that reduces otherness to sameness within a personalized culture, casting doubt on our capacity to know, it refuses the mutuality and dialogue that typify an empathetic approach to understanding” (p. 19). Paradoxically, she aims to “give voice” to the women’s complexity by refusing to serve up readers with an easily-heard voice: “Thus the text works to elicit an experience of the women through the very failures of the book to represent them” (p. 19). Lather attempts a “counter-discourse to defamiliarize common sentiments of empathy, voice and authenticity” (p. 23).

As a doctoral student writing about my first large study, my desire is *not* to frustrate my committee and readers with an “uncooperative” work! Perhaps in future work I can consider the merits of seeking to make my readers uncomfortable, but not now. In writing about the data, I chose to include large sections from interview and focus group transcripts of the participants’ own words. I did this in an effort to make their voices central (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Hatch, 2002) and to represent participants’ complexity, and I did this in an effort to allow readers to see what and how I was analyzing. I also sometimes included my own OCs from the transcription because I think it allows readers to get a glimpse into my “backstage” work and the steps I took in analysis. In addition to my discussions on both the memo-writing process and my process of analyzing and coding, including excerpts of interview transcripts and my own OCs serve to increase trustworthiness.

“Strong Reflexivity,” My Subjectivity, and the Researcher-Participant Dynamic

“Strong objectivity requires that the subject of knowledge be placed on the same critical, causal plane as the objects of knowledge. Thus, strong objectivity requires what we can think of as ‘strong reflexivity’” (Harding, 2004c, p. 136).

“Fieldworkers are typically one up on those they study” (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 5).

A reflexive approach to research means recognizing that my subjectivity as a researcher is central to the research process. While teachers’ negotiations with “blame game” discourses are the “object” or phenomenon that I investigate, Harding (2004c) argues that I as the researcher must also be placed under examination. At the same time, though, often the researcher is *not* on the same plane as the participant, as Van Maanen (1988) reminds us. Purposely attending to my subjectivity and the politics of my interactions with participants throughout data collection and analysis were important ways of making the research dynamic less unequal. I have already discussed my subjectivity indirectly throughout this chapter—in describing my critical theoretical orientation, for instance, and in describing agreements and disagreements with particular participants. Here, I pay close attention to how my identity and my interactions with teachers—especially our raced locations—shaped the research process.

In some ways, the researcher will always have power over her research participants because the researcher does the analysis and represents the perspective or voice of the participant (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Alcoff (1991-92) notes that the place from where we speak—our social location—affects what we say and the weight it holds, perhaps especially when we are privileged and speak for others who are marginalized. While speaking for and about others has its risks, one always speaks for others—one can never represent only herself, in research or elsewhere: “When I ‘speak for myself’ I am participating in the creation and reproduction of

discourses through which my own and other selves are constituted” (p. 21). Feminist and other qualitative researchers have worked to make the research dynamic less unequal, less hierarchical in a variety of ways, in order to not distort the subject’s voice.

When the research process takes place across uneven power arrangements, between researchers and participants unequally positioned by race or sexuality, for instance, researchers need to reflect on how this dynamic of different social locations affects the research. McCorkel and Myers (2003) remind us that the researcher’s subjectivity greatly shapes the voices she will represent. They reflect on their own research “backstage” to consider how the position of the researcher, especially a researcher’s racial privilege, influences the research project at all stages. These white, feminist women researchers interviewed women of color, and they “saw it as [their] job as feminist ethnographers to give voice to women whose views and experiences were overlooked in sociological and political discourses” (p. 227). Despite this intention, however, McCorkel and Myers realized they needed to explore how they were “influenced by master narratives when making sense of [their] experiences in the field and the degree to which these narratives found their way into [their] analytic interpretations of [their] respondents and their worlds” (p. 201). Best (2003) also attends to racial differences, as well as age and class differences, between her and her interview respondents. Best revisits interviews she had conducted with young women of color in high school, talking about their prom experiences. As a white woman, Best reflected that some of the girls’ talk and struggle to be heard had to do with the racial gap that existed between them and herself, the researcher. However, Best argues that their racial identities were not complete prior to the research, but “an emergent feature of the research process itself” (p. 908). In the girls making translations and clarifications for Best—and in Best responding to them—all of those in the research context negotiated racialized identities,

actively drew bounds between insider and outsider, and they both relied upon and reshaped notions of whiteness. The students knew that in order to be heard, they had to manage whiteness and try to translate for Best. In so doing, Best argues that whiteness was “made meaningful” (p. 908), not only managed.

I am a white, middle class, straight woman who is committed to racial equality, social justice and feminism. I also benefit from white privilege, can usually easily navigate middle class spaces and rules, and am accustomed to hearing talk from other white, middle class people that perpetuates classism and racism—both of the “color-blind” and more explicit varieties. What does all this mean for interviewing urban teachers—some white, some people of color, most middle class, some with social justice or critical perspectives, and some without—about how they understand their work in urban schools and their urban students? How did I see them, and how did they see me? How did this affect what we shared with one another? Thoughtful about and interested in these questions, I tried to maintain what Dunbar, Rodriguez and Parker (2002) call a “procedural consciousness”—a kind of racial sensibility and attentiveness on the part of the researcher. I remained alert to how race and racial discourses are intertwined with the whole research practice: “[T]he interview process and the interpretation of interview material must take into account how social and historical factors—especially those associated with race—mediate both the meanings of questions that are asked and how those question are answered” (p. 280).

I enacted this consciousness in choosing what to disclose about myself and my politics to my participants, but I did not always know to what end. In other words, I was conscious that I was making decisions in asking about race directly or not, for instance, or sharing my perspectives on inclusion and special education, but I was not sure they were the right decisions. Decisions about what to reveal about myself and my research project (and what to not disclose)

definitely depended on what I learned about my participants in the context of the interviews and how they positioned themselves and talked about inequality. Although I thought about these issues prior to the interview, I often decided how to position myself during the course of the interview, in an ongoing manner. I noticed in an interview with Andre, for instance, that I asked directly whether his school talked about social justice, or whether people at his school talked about race and class. I did not do this with all my participants, so why did I with Andre? What did I lose and gain from asking about this directly? Perhaps I asked this question as part of my feminist, critical orientation and I was hoping to “engage in transformative dialogues that serve to raise the consciousness of participants and plant the seeds of critique and resistance” with my participant (Hatch, 2002, pp. 93-94). Perhaps I wanted to show myself as a social justice “insider,” guessing that Andre shared some of these politics because of our mutual friend. On some level, I always wanted to reveal *some* of my own beliefs and interests to avoid “othering” my participants in asking them to share personal information and sharing very little about myself (Fine, 1998). Perhaps I was trying to cross a racial divide, anticipating that Andre knew that without a critical lens, many white people might read what he said in a different way. Perhaps I wanted to simply appear as a good white person (Applebaum, 2010).

Like Best (2003), I am persuaded by the idea that our racial identities and the meanings of race were often constructed and reconstructed in the interviews themselves. Even when there seemed to be a *shared* social location between the participant and me, there were many opportunities for working out our identities in relation to one another—and opportunities for mistaken assumptions. When teachers—especially, perhaps, white teachers—re-constructed the Urban as pathology, it was difficult to tell which parts of their stories came from their experiences, which parts were shaped by powerful deficit discourse that already constructs the

Urban as “different” and full of problems, and which parts were shaped by the fact they were telling the stories *to me*. For instance, as I discuss in Chapter Four, Jack often constructed his students’ parents in a negative light—as cursing and “drunk and ready to fight.” I wondered if he did so in part because I was white and middle class and he read me as different from urban families and similar to him. Did he assume I would accept this construction of urban parents? Was he trying to shock me with the things he had to “deal with” at the city school?

When teachers engaged in “personal school talk,” a code I discuss more in Chapter Four, this talk sometimes illuminated not only how teachers’ own schooling experiences were different from or superior to urban school experiences, but this talk also constructed our identities—the participants’ and mine—in certain ways and functioned to create a common ground within the interview space. I sometimes noticed how teachers assumed my schooling experiences must be similar to their own. Erica, for example, discussed the pressure on students in Chicago to get into a top high school, and she contrasted that with her own life at the age of thirteen:

Erica: And the thing about Chicago is, you get into a selective enrollment high school and you make it to a good college, or you get funneled into your public high schools and you go to community college. And it’s like, they’re at a make-or-break point at thirteen.

Can you imagine what your life would be like if it were based on your motivation at thirteen? (OC: dramatic pause) I could not tell you what my GPA was in middle school.

Heidi: Right.

Erica: But if my entire life trajectory were anchored to my motivation at like, 12 or 13 years old? I would be in a *very* different place than I am now. Like, I had my entire high school to try and make up for, you know, the mistakes I made when I was in middle school.

Erica's use of "imagine what your life would be like..." is telling. She assumes that she and I both did not endure the pressure her eighth grades students did, so we would have to "imagine" what it would be like. She assumes (rightly, for the most part) that my schooling experiences, like hers, are *different* than her urban students' experiences. It seemed like we were engaging in some kind of middle class talk or "white talk" (Frankenberg, 1993; McIntyre, 1997; Simpson, 1996), and perhaps we were reinforcing the middle class normative construction of schooling and the construction of innocent childhood. Erica is critical of the undue pressure put on her students, but this kind of privileged talk between us also necessitated—and furthered—somewhat of a shared idea of what school *should* be like for students (and of how urban schools are defective and force students to grow up too fast, for instance), and it confirmed and re-affixed us in positions of privilege.

In order to establish some trust with my participants, I also positioned myself as a learner and positioned them as experts. At the start of interviews, I described generally that I was interested in studying urban teachers' experiences but that I really wanted to learn more from them. This approach signals respect for participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 107). Some TFA teachers, as I mentioned, seemed hesitant to speak about their experience, lest I add to the mounting critiques of TFA. To build their trust, I did not always share my knowledge of these existing critiques. When Leah brought up Michelle Rhee, for instance, I did not feel the need to share my perspective of Rhee and her politics, and to appear as a "know-it-all" (p. 98). Instead, I let her inform me about Rhee. In showing that I trusted and valued her knowledge—in treating her as an expert—I think it was easier for Leah to trust me with her perspective.

Limitations

While I conducted interviews that produced what I think are rich data, I want to recognize that there was potential danger in interviewing some of my TFA participants only once. Because some TFA teachers lived in other cities, and because I sometimes lost contact with them, I was not able to interview all of them twice as I would have liked (even though two times is not a magic number). Duneier (2007) worries “the structured one shot interview” does not allow for understanding the complexity and context of a participant’s life (Duneier, 2007, p. 36, citing Liebow, 1968). By making my interviews semi-structured and open-ended, however, I was able to get at a lot of the complexity of participants’ perspectives.

I also could have been more systematic in writing research memos, and I could have had people other than Sari review transcriptions and memos. I realized that Sari and I shared many theoretical and political views, so perhaps where she and I saw the same thing happening in the data, someone with a different background might have seen other things. While I value my frameworks and think they are a strength rather than a weakness, they are still the lens with which I interpreted the data. I had other colleagues review memos where I had already developed some codes, but I could have had colleagues look at data that I had not yet coded, as well.

To return to the metaphor of “windows” that Cohn (2006) used in her multi-sited ethnography on national security discourse, I also would have liked to trace the deficit and neoliberal discourses in teachers’ talk in *more* windows or sites. These discourses are significant in part because they seem to take hold and make sense in such a *range* of spaces and kinds of talk. Although it is useful to understand these particular teachers’ relationships with these powerful discourses in these two different educational programs, neoliberal logics and deficit thinking are *mobile* and pervade many other sites. Nadai and Maeder (2009) note that in 1986,

Marcus worried “why this group rather than another, why this locale rather than another” (p. 233, citing Marcus, 1986). Nadai and Maeder argue that this “problem of the field” that ethnographers faced nearly thirty years ago remains today because we have to “find ways to investigate research objects disembedded from the local and inextricably connected to global forces and systems of symbols and knowledge” (p. 233). Cohn’s scholarship on the “moving target” of U.S. national security spanned two decades and multiple research projects, which hints at how complex a multi-sited ethnography can be. While more windows were not feasible for this dissertation study (Two decades? No thanks!), I hope I can continue to pursue my own moving targets and construct more “fuzzy fields” (Nadai & Maeder, 2005) in the future.

CHAPTER FOUR

Urban Teachers Making Sense of “These Kids,” “Ridiculous Families” and

“Bad Neighborhoods”: The Deficit Discourse Persists

As I describe in Chapter Two, deficit discourse is extremely available both within urban schools and in larger social discourse; this discourse is what allows for the “intelligibility” of the urban student (Popkewitz, 1998, p. 9). In telling me about their work with urban students, teachers were influenced by deficit discourse. Teachers both relied on and furthered social constructions of “The Urban” as Other. Sometimes they directly talked about how the urban—and urban students and families—were “different,” and other times teachers’ stories indirectly served to reproduce the urban as Other—as “bad”, “rough”, or full of kids who would “spit you out.” As teachers constructed the urban through their talk, they implicitly constructed the non-urban “norm”, of course, as well—as expected, as good, as the way things *should* be in their schools, but were not.

The urban teachers in the study activated deficit discourse in different ways. They highlighted student misbehavior and students’ potential to become “out of control.” They talked about students swearing and fighting, being “wise beyond their years,” and being interested in gangs and other “negative aspects” of their neighborhoods. Teachers saw their students as untrustworthy and “unbelievable” (Biklen & Pitzer, 2012). Many teachers described their urban teaching experience *as* an experience—as something different than their normal or expected daily life—but much of what they said followed the same, old logic of deficit thinking that “different...is deficient” (Theoharis, 2007, p. 11). Their stories often reproduced the “already-known” construction of the Urban as pathology, and “as white, middle-class audiences want to see it” (Henke, 2008, p. 101). In other words, teachers *re*-constructed urban schooling as

“different” but simultaneously familiar and *known*, in a sense, and *not* different from the raced and classed ideas of urban education that already exist and circulate.

In this chapter, I analyze teacher talk that I coded as “students as lack.” This code includes any instances when teachers talked about their students being deficient in some way. Teachers talked about urban students as lacking academic skills and being behind in reading or other subjects; as having “behavior problems”; as having social or emotional problems; as being involved with gangs or engaging in other undesirable actions; as not doing appropriate middle class activities like traveling or going to museums; and as not speaking English well. I also devote a section to urban students’ families and discuss how teachers regularly saw them through a deficit lens. Teachers understood their urban students *as lack* (rather than *as competent*, for instance). However, this lack was not *always* understood through a deficit discourse that essentializes the deficiency as stemming from or being the fault of individual poor kids and kids of color and their families. I attempt to distinguish between teacher talk that constructed deficiencies as inherent in urban students and talk that seemed to recognize a structural or social source of a student’s apparent lack. For example, to notice that a student lacks a particular kind of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) is very different from believing a student’s culture itself is defective. In addition to discussing how teachers navigated the deficit discourse in understanding their students and students’ parents, I also consider how the developmental model intersects with deficit thinking and how urban teachers’ own educational experiences acted as a contrast to the urban schools in which they worked.

“These Kids”: Urban Students as Lack

Students in Need of Control, Discipline, and Behavior Monitoring

“When you make behavior the forefront of a kid’s day, behavior will be the forefront of their day. You know what I mean?” –Kelly

One of the central features of deficit discourse is the presumption that urban students are bound to become “out of control” and are thus in need of constant surveillance and strict discipline. Both TFA teachers and teachers from Project Voice were frequently swept up in this belief of students *as* behavior problems, and many school rules and structures seemed founded on this belief. From time to time teachers resisted the particular mechanisms in place to control students, but the underlying idea that students’ bodies—and talk—needed to be mastered was more difficult to upend.

Sometimes teachers did not start directly with the assertion that urban students and their behavior were “challenging.” Instead, something about the urban construct was *vaguely* challenging. It took some pressing to better understand teachers’ perspectives on this challenging feature of urban schooling. I started my interview with Anne by asking her a broad question about her experience teaching as a TFA teacher. From the start, Anne described her urban school experience as challenging and “overwhelming”:

Anne: I mean, I think it was... challenging. (laughs) Um, so you’re thinking... I’m thinking about like the first couple weeks of teaching, is what you’re asking me about...?

Heidi: Sure, you can start with that. Yeah.

Anne: Um, I think it's very... It can be very overwhelming. Certainly, if you're teaching for Teach For America, you are put in a school that is probably more challenging than most schools around the country, I would say...

I followed up with questions to get at what exactly was challenging, but it seems that part of the reason Anne and other participants could be vague is that they assumed the Urban was a shared concept—an “already known” idea that I would similarly and already understand *as* challenging. Emily, a teacher who had completed her TFA tenure in Brooklyn, also said her teaching experience was “definitely challenging, and it was more... It's hard to see kids kind of in those situations and in those neighborhoods, all combined and dealing with it.” TFAer Nisha, too, described the Urban as vaguely “bad,” signaling that she and I should have some shared understanding of what a bad school or a bad neighborhood means:

Nisha: Why did I apply to Teach For America? I actually, while I was an undergrad, was working at a volunteer center on my campus. I went to USC in LA, and if you know anything about the USC area, the campus is beautiful and gorgeous, but as you step out of that one block radius, then you're in a very bad area of town.

In this kind of talk, the Urban provides a space to discuss classed and racial Others without always using the language of race and poverty (Popkewitz, 1998; Watson, 2011). Talking about the urban as bad, challenging or overwhelming is often code for black and brown students and non-middle class students *themselves* as bad, challenging or overwhelming. As Watson (2011) argues, using the word “urban” signals “less than.” Teachers also used the term “these kids” as a code or way to express deficit thinking about poor students and students of color. Christine, one of the Project Voice teachers, repeated what another teacher, Maddie,

worried about—that their students “go home at the end of the day.” She portrayed their work as up against the deficits these students brought with them. “More and more,” she said, “we’re getting *these* kids.” From the teachers’ perspectives there were “normal” kid problems and urban problems. Urban problems involved *these* kids, and *these* kids needed extra or different support.

In many instances, teachers talked directly about student behavior and school discipline. Teachers seemed to take for granted that urban schools require a strict discipline system, and that urban students do not take education seriously without firm rules. Jack, a teacher involved in Project Voice that had started at Garber School, criticized what he saw as a lack of order at both Garber and at his current school, Niles School:

Jack: We talk about principals that just take care of fires or principals that take care of the bigger vision of the school, you know what I mean?

Heidi: Right.

Jack: And those schools do better because they build community, they build a sense of belonging, a sense of what to *do* in a school. So they don’t have to put out those fires eventually. In the beginning, you know, you have to constantly: procedure, procedure, procedure. Once the kids know it, it shouldn’t be a problem.

Heidi: So is there anything here at Niles that...

Jack: Nothing.

Heidi: ...that ties you together?

Jack: Nothing.

Heidi: No?

Jack: Nothing that I’ve seen. Not this year. Last year, yeah.

Heidi: What was last year?

Jack: Last year the kids knew it. Niles was like Shangri-La compared to Garber. People used to say, “Where’d you come from?” I said, “Garber.” They’re like, “Oh, this place is kind of crazy.” I’m like, “You must be out of your mind.” This place is amazing. The kids walk down the hall... You know, there’s a couple here or there, you know. It’s what we do.

Heidi: But is that the same thing as like a school culture or community?

Jack: Oh, 100 percent. That’s exactly...

Heidi: What?

Jack: If it’s okay to run the halls and to not go to class every day, then they’ll do it.

Heidi: Oh.

Jack: If it’s not, and you set that precedent first, then they won’t do it. If they take, um, education seriously—*them*, not just because they want good grades, but *they* understand it—and that was instilled here. It really was. And it ended abruptly September 5th.

Heidi: So, like the rules and procedures were all in place so then there could be some kind of purpose?

Jack: Positive culture, yes. Yeah.

For Jack, the mark of a good school—a school that is like “Shangri-La”—is that kids walk down the hall and are orderly and controlled. Without strict rules and procedures, urban students are bound to become out of control and to “run the halls and to not go to class.” A school discipline system is *so* important, that it becomes synonymous with “community” or a “sense of

belonging.” A shared school culture is, indeed, vitally important, but it does not have to center on control and order. However, when the deficit belief that urban students are perpetually on the verge of being out of control predominates, a strong system of discipline becomes *the* “vision,” *the* way to achieve “positive culture.”

While there are other principles or visions that can tie a school together, other teachers also recognized it was often discipline that stood in as the commonsense thing that should unite an urban school. Andre, a TFA teacher who had worked in the Southeast, acknowledged that *control* and “school-wide structure” at his KIPP charter school were one and the same:

Andre: So, that was controversial. At the beginning of the year, my peers at Teach For America envied me because they would walk into the classroom and observe, and the students looked so excited about learning, and they looked all very uniform, so it looks like you have real control.

Heidi: Very controlled.

Andre: Yeah, and I understand that coming from some of the situations where there’s like no school-wide structure. I think school-wide structure and culture is important, but I think KIPP may have over-done it. But, if you ask some of the other teachers, they are like, “Well, it may be a decent price to pay for this uniformity,” that you can easily pick out someone who’s, you know, not following suit.

Andre was critical of KIPP’s very visual and strict discipline system that required students to sit in particular postures and raise their hands in certain ways, among other things. In the next chapter, I discuss further how this system controlled not only his students but Andre and other

teachers, as well, but this passage highlights that the goal to control urban students' bodies was central and that it was often built into school policies and practices.

In addition to urban teachers seeing students' behavior as a central concern, students involved in Project Voice also talked about the regulation of their bodies in school. Examples of control included how adults worked to physically control student bodies in the classroom, in the halls, and in larger gathering rooms. Students described teachers physically moving them from one space to another by grabbing their arms and propelling them in particular directions. They said teachers were always "cautious" because of their fear that students would get "out of control." In one student focus group, a sixth grader talked about an experience when he stopped to tie his shoe in the hallway. A teacher yelled at him because the teacher assumed the student was purposefully holding up the line in the hall. Project Voice teachers reaffirmed students' views on the perceived need for hyper-control of black and brown bodies in the school when they compared their students to suburban youth, saying that Garber School could never give their students the freedom that the students in suburban schools had. (Biklen & Pitzer, 2012).

Teachers did not always or fully buy into the supposed need to control urban students. Kelly was one of the teachers who seemed most cognizant and critical of the focus on the behavior of urban students. Kelly had been a TFA teacher previously, and when I met her, she had just returned to working in education as an Assessment Coordinator at a New York City charter school. Like Andre, she had also taught in a charter school. While it was not a KIPP school, this school also expected students to sit in a posture—this one called the "star" pose—while in the classroom, in addition to following other rules meant to control their bodies:

Kelly: They all wore uniforms; they all have to sit like this... This is star. (She sits up straight, with her feet shoulder width apart, flat on the floor, and her hands folded on the table with elbows pointed outward.)

Heidi: Star?

Kelly: Star, feet on the floor like this. No adult sits like this, so why are you making...? I would have kids who were doing their work, but they were sitting like this. (slouches) They were going like this... (shifts in her seat). They were doing their work, but the school wanted everything to look the same, so I had to ask them to sit like this ("star" pose). The kid is doing your work—why do you care that they sit like this? It just doesn't...

Kelly went on to explain that there were different gestures and hand signals that the school required students to use for "I agree," "I disagree," "I want a private conversation," and "I have to go to the bathroom." She was concerned that students had to—and did—submit to these rules:

Kelly: Here's a story. They were at Field Day; this was last year, not the year I was there. A child stood at Field Day like this and peed his pants because no one gave him permission to go to the restroom, because he couldn't think for himself, "I have to go to the bathroom. I'm not going to do this; I'm going to go ask an adult." That's not setting a child up for success, when they can't be free thinkers, when everything is laid out for them. There was a way to walk in the hall.

Heidi: Right.

- Kelly: Head behind head, feet together, hands in your pockets. You could put your hands in your pockets in fourth grade, but K-3 you had to have your hands straight by your side. You couldn't say a word.
- Heidi: That's interesting. So when they get older, then they're allowed to use their pockets?
- Kelly: Then they could put their hands in their pockets.
- Heidi: Oh God. Who has time to even look for that?
- Kelly: Then if one kid got out of line... The expectation there was silence, so it got... What classroom is completely silent? That's what they expect, so when you heard [drops her pencil] everyone was like, "What was that?" Even I got to the point where the littlest sound drove me batty. Can you imagine that? These are kids! They make noises, you know?....They shuffle, so when that happens, they're so desperate to make noise or to have something not be completely silent.
- Heidi: Yeah, they have a lot of energy.
- Kelly: When you didn't have that there was no... You just can't expect that from them. A kid would sneeze and they would all be so desperate to say something you would get fifteen "Bless you!"s because they just wanted to say something. They wanted to talk, they wanted to work in partners. There were two volumes at NYC Uncommon;¹⁰ one was dead-silent and one was way too loud, because they weren't taught how to work with a

¹⁰ Kelly did work at one of the Uncommon Schools in New York, but "NYC Uncommon" is a pseudonym; it is not the name of an actual Uncommon School. There are twenty-one Uncommon Charter Schools in New York ("All charter schools by city", 2014), so I am able to disclose that Kelly worked for Uncommon without identifying her.

little bit of noise, because the expectation is perfection. I don't think you can expect that from kids.

Beyond her critique of this level of control, Kelly also recognized an overreliance on the “tally” system that was in place at her school and the way it made behavior management the “forefront of a kid’s day.” Kelly mentioned that she struggled with planning her first year. She taught ELA, reading, math, science, social studies, writing, and health to her fifth graders, and she admitted that she did not always prepare as she would have liked for each of those subjects. This, in conjunction with a tally system not of her choosing resulted in behavior challenges:

Kelly: To be honest, the fact of the matter is, I didn’t. It was like survival mode. I did what I could. My behavior management was horrible, horrible.

Heidi: What do you mean?

Kelly: Because they teach all these things, like tally sheets. I remember one session we had where each kid was supposed to have a thing on their desk and every time you gave a direction and they didn’t follow it, we’d put a tally mark. At the end of the day you would give a score to the parents.

When Kelly first said her behavior management was “horrible,” I thought she was about to activate deficit discourse that constructed “these kids” as behavior problems. However, Kelly saw the tally system *itself* as the problem. She said she was able to have better classroom management when she did not use the tally system. Her students were better when she was able to give them “other reasons to want to do a good job in terms of their academics and in terms of their behavior,” but she ran into trouble when she had to “stick to something like tallies.” I asked her to tell me more about the “tally” system:

Heidi: And that was a school policy?

Kelly: School-wide, Yep.

Heidi: Did other teachers get frustrated with it?

Kelly: Yeah, I think so. I think, sometimes yes. Yes, because everything came down to... Fourth grade was different. We had tallies because when they get up to middle academy, they have demerits. It was a different system in fifth grade, so we were prepping them for them. All of the other grades had check-ins, so at five different times of the day they would have this board, and it was like zero, one, two, three, four, and the kids couldn't move up. They all started at... I don't know where they started, but they did have the opportunity to move up, whereas the fourth grade did not. So, when they got a certain number of tallies, that was zero checks. So many of them were so...had anger management issues, so once they realized they were going home with zero checks and they couldn't redeem themselves from that, then, "Screw it!" I'd say that, too. I'd be like, "You know what? I'm not trying for the rest of the day." If I'm at work and my pay is based on mistakes, and I made a couple of mistakes today, now my pay is knocked down 15%. I can't go down anymore, but I certainly can't bring it back up. Well then, I'm getting a coffee, I'm kicking my legs up, and I'm watching Netflix. I think the same thing happens with the kids. If they have no opportunity to redeem themselves, why should they?

Kelly is very critical of the intricacies of this kind of behavior accounting system, and she had resisted using it with her students. I appreciate how she tries to put herself in her students' shoes, making an analogy to what she would do if her pay were cut and she had no second chances to

correct mistakes. However, when she says her students had “anger management issues,” it also seems like the “these kids” deficit discourse sneaks in a bit and allows this tally system to seem somewhat logical still. Kelly resisted this specific tally system, but the underlying idea that she was dealing with “these kids” remained, to some extent.

When controlling student behavior was a primary focus in urban schools, it was hard to also focus on academics; students constructed as behavior problems or potential problems could not easily be seen simultaneously as intellectually capable beings. Andre noticed that in his district, uniforms signaled a focus on control, whereas schools that did not require uniforms focused more on academics:

Andre: Every public school but the one I went to had uniforms. It’s just, I think, a spillover from the high Catholic culture. Everyone wears uniforms.

Heidi: Okay. Do most of the schools have shirts or something?

Andre: Yes. It’s like a polo with “KIPP” on it, and then you wear slacks. You will find that in almost every single public school in the city. In other cities—I have to get used to other cities where school kids just don’t wear uniforms unless they go to Catholic schools or private schools. This is kind of the opposite. There are a couple of private schools in the city that don’t do uniforms. It’s kind of like a sign of your school being, like, academically challenging and them not having to worry about discipline, I guess.

Andre noticed what I had noticed in my work on Project Voice, and what other TFA teachers were telling me in a variety of ways—that schools tend to be defined or predominated *either* by behavior *or* by academics, and that deficit discourse lowers expectations for student achievement. Teachers’ stories revealed that it is difficult to see students with both lenses! Either

you are a student worthy of education (who can be trusted to wear your own clothes), or you are a student worthy of control. For instance, during a visit to Jack's class to talk to Project Voice students about the difference between capturing "A roll" and "B roll," in preparation for starting their films, I observed this either/or binary. A DARE officer was visiting the class, leading a lesson on peer pressure and how to resist taking drugs. As part of her lesson, she had given the students a short, illustrated workbook that included a story about peer pressure and some reflection questions that the students were supposed to answer. One of the characters was named Cory, and one student wanted to know which character Cory was in the illustration:

Latron: Yeah, um which one is Cory? The one with—

Officer: Oh, I don't know. It's just a cartoon picture.

Ronnie: That's Cory right there on the—

Jack: Don't worry about it! We don't got to worry about it!

Rather than see the students as academically oriented and actually interested in engaging with this story, they were constructed as people to be controlled. It seemed the goal was not student learning but keeping students quiet and passive. To make matters worse, a few minutes later the officer asked the students to pretend to be Cory in order to answer the questions: "And then you're going to respond as though you were Cory. You're going to answer him back as Cory." Despite the fact that being able to identify Cory was actually important for this task, the students' attempt to make the story meaningful was seen as merely disruptive.

The deficit discourse results in the control of students' bodies, but it also regulates what students can and should talk about, and how they express themselves. In navigating deficit discourse, teachers often constructed students as "bad" and in need of fixing, but they simultaneously reproduced dominant norms in constructing what the "good student" should look

like. In a Project Voice focus group, Maddie complained about her students' behavior after a class field trip to a senior center, revealing in part her ideas of the "good student":

Maddie: That when they're on their own, when they have to make choices on their own, and no one is telling them what to do, they are 99.9 % not making the right choice. They're not saying the right things—and they don't need to say things that I'm interested in.... But their side conversations? It's like who shot who, who went up there with a knife, who did this, and I'm like, and I honestly was just like, "Can you just stop talking?" And then two minutes later, they're like rapping about something. And I just looked at them like, "You were my group, I don't get it, I had so much fun with you guys today." I really had a great time with my group. And I just listened to them and I honestly look at them and I'm like, "I don't know if there's hope for you outside of school, because during the day you do what I need you to do and it's great, but as soon as I'm not around and you have time when no adults are around listening to you, this is what you talk about."

Like many teachers, Maddie seems to think being good and having good things to talk about means acting middle class. Later in this particular focus group meeting, Maddie also complained that students taped boom boxes to their bicycles "because the adults have their cars on *max*," and the boys are "emulating...what they see other men do in their culture." Maddie knows that loud car stereos are code for acting black or acting "urban." As a black woman, Maddie has a real concern for how white, middle-class people will negatively perceive her students, and it seems like she believes that students must assimilate to this dominate culture in order to succeed, and it

is her job to help them do so. Maddie's high hopes and expectations of her students not only get trumped by the deficit discourse that works to produce urban students as lack, but this discourse also helps to shape those very hopes and expectations to be ones of assimilation.

Urban Students in Need...But Not to Blame

When there is a mismatch perceived between urban schools and urban students—in expectations, goals, practices, language, and so on—often it is understood as a deficit on the students' part. However, not all that urban students (actually) lack needs to be understood as rooted in deficit discourse. Students can be in need of things without this need being rooted in deficit thinking. Indeed, it is important—but difficult—to try to distinguish between the times when teachers saw urban students *themselves* as deficient or flawed, and times when they saw students as suffering from a flaw in the school or larger social structure. I found that teachers largely lacked the language to express the broader structural inequalities that their students faced, even when they seemed to *understand* these inequalities. In other words, even when teachers had a sense of how the institution failed students, they often failed to articulate this understanding.

Teachers talked about students who they saw as “behind” and as needing instructional help but did not necessarily blame the students or their families. For instance, Maddie saw some of her students as *lacking* something academically or linguistically, but she pointed out the lack of support the school offered to the students rather than blame the students themselves:

Struggles are the same anywhere. They expect you to take a kid who is three years behind, below grade level, and magically get him on grade level year to year. We don't have any, *any* good resources for ESL kids.

Anne, too, who had been a TFA teacher for two years, said students in her school were behind academically, but she did not wholly ascribe that to the students. She told me how her school had been taken over by the state and that the administration was new:

Anne: So, those people were new, and we not only had to answer to the district and then the normal state standards—there were additional standards placed on us, as far as... We had to be making improvement, we had to create a plan—I don't remember what it was called—but some sort of action plan of steps that were going to be taken to become a performing school, so...

Heidi: Each teacher?

Anne: The school as a whole did, but like involving parents, and community, and things like that. And making this plan, so... But before this happened, our school was considered a failing school, I think for six or seven years. So, for me, that really clarified the fact that like my fifth grade students have been going to a school that in theory has not been teaching them well the entire time they've been in school. Not to say, though, that they haven't had good teachers along the way, but at least overall, not doing well, so.

Here, while Anne seems to have bought into the legitimacy of test scores and a failing label, and the subsequent takeover and re-staffing, she seems to hold the *school* responsible for students' low achievement rather than see it as symptomatic of urban students themselves.

Teachers were also sometimes (but not always) able to break out of a deficit explanation when sharing concerns about violence in students' neighborhoods. This topic of safety, at least, seemed to make visible teachers' negotiations between deficit and more structural

understandings of students' lives. Teachers rightly saw that urban students often lacked access to safe housing and recreational areas, but it was not always clear *how* they understood this lack.

Emily brought up the topic of safety when she said her parents and grandparents were upset that she would be teaching as a TFA teacher in Brooklyn because they saw it as a dangerous area:

Heidi: What were they worried about?

Emily: My safety.

Heidi: Okay, just like because of the kinds of stereotypes...?

Emily: Hm-mm. Well, statistically, too. (OC: Her tone of voice and her look was almost chastising, like, "Come on, you should know this reality. Don't be naïve.")

Heidi: Yeah...

Emily: Yeah. But, I mean...

Heidi: "The big bad city."

Emily: I mean, Brownsville had the highest murder rates in all New York.

Near where she got off of the subway to go to work, Emily said she had seen a dead body at what she believed was a murder crime scene. She said, "It was really bad there." Perhaps because Emily sensed that I did not take for granted that Brownsville was a violent space in the same way she did, she shared another example to highlight the reality of the "badness" of the area:

Emily: The kids would... I mean, I had to call home one day because a kid wasn't wearing like the right shoes—you know, like those Wheelies? And I'm like, "No, your kid can't wear them." And they were like, "Sorry. We tried to get him out to the bus because there was like a murder in the front yard." Like, "Okaaay!"

Heidi: And you're like, never mind.

Emily: Right. And that's their everyday life. Every day. Gangs, and gangs within the school and everything...

Emily worried about her students being in a high-crime environment, but it is difficult to know how she understood the *causes* for violence. When I asked Emily how she talked to her students about the violence she observed, she said, "My job is to try to give them the tools that they'll stay away from it." Does she see the violence as inevitable, as an inherent part of urban "culture?" Or does she have a more critical view that understands social injustices? She does not paint the parents as deficient in this story, but she also constructs students as kind of destined to be drawn to gangs and violence—at least without her guidance to "stay away from it."

When teachers from Project Voice discussed the lack of safe places for their students to play, they too struggled with how to express their desire for safe spaces for students without simply blaming the parents for living in dangerous neighborhoods. Teachers simultaneously appreciated that urban parents cared for their children and did not let them outside to play in unsafe neighborhoods, for instance, *and* condemned parents for living in such a neighborhood. Gorski (2013) notes that even when teachers are able to identify violence as a social problem that urban students and their families often have to *face* (rather than viewing students and families as themselves part of a violent culture), it is still easy to place the blame on the family and to ask why the family does not simply move. With such strong discourses of meritocracy circulating, and with widespread misunderstandings of the nature and causes of poverty and violence, the language of individual choice is persuasive and leads us to ask the wrong questions—As Maddie asked about the mothers of two of her students, why don't parents who could send their kids to a

different school do so? And, as Emily wondered, how can we give students tools to choose to stay away from gangs?

One of the teachers who most clearly worked to sort out what “these kids” lacked—or not—was Pritika. Pritika had completed her TFA teaching previously and had just finished a master’s in education policy when I met her. She also worried about the realities that “these kids” faced, such as violence, and reflected on how the school should respond:

You're just kept with one cohort of students all day long, all week long. That's confinement. That feels like incarceration at some point. You have a group of students where a lot of our students have awesome parents, but they were very strict because the neighborhoods that they were in were violent. They don't get to go out to play all the time. School should be the place that is safe enough to do that. Our students were very frustrated. They were challenged. They started becoming a lot more hostile toward each other. Sometimes they were “lovey-dovey,” and sometimes there was bullying. There was more bullying increased throughout the year because they were with this one group of students. They never saw the older students; they never interacted with the older students. It just wasn't a healthy environment.

Pritika sees the students as missing something that they should have, but she does not see them or their families through a deficit lens. She makes a point to say that the students’ parents are “awesome,” and she understands students as *feeling* challenged—as responding to problems rather than being the bearers of problems. The administration at Pritika’s school supported making this kind of distinction:

Pritika: I had a principal at this third school that was very aware about language around students and parents. Whenever some teachers said, “You don't

understand that ‘these students’ are very challenging,” or whatever, he would correct them and say, “We don’t say ‘these students’. Talk about your particular student that... Individualize.”

Heidi: Who would say “these students” and then be corrected?

Pritika: You know, *if* teachers said that, then he would correct them. There were times where you can’t escape that phrase, because you *do* mean “these students.” You do mean “this population of students” that we work with. Even he would slip up and say it sometimes. It got to the point where there was “the blame game.” There was, “‘This community’ is very challenging. The parents in ‘this community’ don’t care. The students in ‘this community’ deal with so much outside that they can’t concentrate inside.” It started becoming a blame game on the external factors. Even though they were aware that external issues do influence the school dynamic, there was a blame on that and not enough address on how to accommodate those challenges in the school environment. A lot of us, who wanted to move in that direction, kept getting very, very frustrated.

Pritika noticed that even when consciously trying to make the distinction between the popular deficit perceptions of urban students as in need of fixing, and the reality that structural inequalities needed fixing, such distinctions are difficult. Whether teachers understood various student lack as stemming from themselves, their family or their culture, *or not*, the fact that teachers so often saw them as nevertheless deficient in some way is significant because it made it difficult to see the strengths students had. Pritika worried that a focus on harmful “external factors” was important but not everything.

Urban Students' Families

As I described in the literature review in Chapter Two, a central part of deficit discourse is the belief that families of urban students do not value education and that they do not adequately prepare their children to enter school ready to learn (Alonso et al., 2009; Burke & Burke, 2005; Delpit, 1995; García & Guerra, 2004; Gorski, 2013; Payne, 2008; Shields et al., 2005; Valencia, 1997; 2010). Some urban teachers see their students as “damaged” by their home life rather than supported by their families, which can shift teachers’ attention away from high academic expectations for their students (Payne, 2008, p. 73). García and Guerra’s (2004) study found that when asked about students’ characteristics, urban teachers focused on “students’ life experiences or behaviors (e.g., burdened, underprivileged, disrespectful, or disorderly) rather than their learning characteristics or needs” (p. 160). The deficit discourse constructs poor families and families of color as always already lacking in some way, while white middle-class families are constructed as the implicit norm and are assumed *not* to be deficient from the get-go. School officials can of course find problems with white and middle class families, but their privilege affords them a kind of benefit of the doubt or a clean slate to start.

Both TFA and Project Voice teachers frequently disparaged urban students’ families. Drawing on deficit discourse, they assumed the home life of their students was deficient—that parents did not have a strong “level of investment in a kid’s performance,” or that time spent at home meant only “loss” and resulted in regression of students’ skills. Teachers like Christine and Maddie bemoaned that no matter what they did in school with students, “they go home at the end of the day.” Nisha, who had done TFA in Los Angeles, discussed working with a non-profit, after-school program geared at young men at her school, and she described her role as “the mom of the group”:

There was me and another Teach For America teacher; both of us were good friends and then we just decided to help tutor the kids....This program is very, very male-centric, but the fact that we were, you know, still there to provide that adult support to them...

Because a lot of times, their parents are so busy, single-parent homes, you know, they don't get to have that sense of family.

This teacher saw her role as filling a presumed void in the students' defective family structure. The deficit discourse can hide in the way urban teachers said they care for and love their students because there is often an implicit blame placed on parents who are perceived as *not* doing this care work. Students are constructed as in need of care, rather than in need of instruction and learning (García & Guerra, 2004).

The teachers involved in Project Voice also shared the perspective that their students came from faulty families. At a planning meeting with the teachers and project researchers, for example, the teachers said that their students were regularly exposed to inappropriate movies at home. We were discussing a potential field trip to the university for the Project Voice students to tour music and TV studios, screen some of the films they had made, and create their own music videos, among other activities. When music videos came up, 4th grade teacher Christine laughingly asked, "Are they child-friendly? What am I talking about?" Michael, one of the PIs, asked if the teachers needed to say something about possible PG-13 material in the permission slips:

Michael: Are you going to put PG-13 in the fine print of the permissions?

Maddie: Oh, our kids have seen *everything!* *Precious*, *The Hangover*...

Christine: *We* have to be really careful about what we show, but these kids *come in*, you know, in 1st grade and they've seen every slasher movie, every...

Jack: *Saw 15*, they already saw it, on bootleg!

Christine: ...every R rated movie that you can imagine! The least appropriate.

The teachers see the students and their families through a deficit lens; students are assumed to “come in” to school already having seen bad movies—already, as Payne (2008) said, “damaged” (p. 73). Christine also pits teachers against students’ families here; teachers are constrained and have to be careful with what they show in class, but ostensibly parents do not. Jack continued:

Jack: *Saw* whatever... The last one came out the day of, and I was like, “Who went to see... what did you guys do over the weekend?” “I saw *Saw*.”
 “Really? Where did you see it?” “At home.” It’s like, “Bootleg?”
 They’re like, “Yep, guy on Victor Street has the best bootlegs.” (He laughs.)

Jack sees the parents as not only allowing their kids to watch terrible movies, but he points out that they are watching them in an illegal way. He seems to take pleasure in this and thinks it is funny that his students know who has the best bootlegs.

At another Project Voice meeting, the teachers again saw students’ families as *only* lacking. They complained that it fell to the teachers and the school to pick up the slack:

Jack: ...I don’t want this to be a bitch fest, but it’s like... and, if you can’t do it at home, “Oh, let the teachers do it. Morals? Have the teachers teach morals.”

Christine: Oh, we were talking about that.

Jack: It’s constantly, I believe, put on the school. And I don’t want to say the teachers, but the school. Okay, they’re not doing this at home, let’s feed the kids. Let’s uh...

Christine: Obesity is our problem.

Jack: Yeah, obesity. Now we need to have more time for recess because obesity is an issue, so let the teachers deal with that. Exactly, it's just constantly...or the school deals with that.

Just a few minutes earlier in the meeting, the teachers had been critiquing the emphasis on test scores and the prevailing mode of teaching to just efficiently “get through” with learning (which I discuss in the next chapter). Their almost seamless switch from discussing testing to discussing students’ home life signals that teachers saw urban students’ families as *only* another object of critique, as only another source of hardship for them to deal with. Students’ families were not seen as offering any positives—only a lack of “morals” and lack of proper nutrition.

During a one-on-one interview, Jack again negatively characterized his students’ parents. He described instances when he had been observed by outsiders, and he felt that these outsiders (presumably from the district, but they often did not introduce themselves) could not really understand or evaluate him as a teacher from a short observation. Beyond his critique that visitors barged in unannounced and without introducing themselves to him and to his students, Jack also saw them as detached from the day-to-day realities of school:

Like, I wanted to alleviate the kids’ issues because I think these people are so detached from the trenches, from the kids. They get paid a lot, they’re wearing nice suits, they come to work, they talk to their adults in a civil way, and they don’t get a parent that comes in and says, “Fuck you,” all drunk and ready to fight. Maybe they don’t remember what it was like? Or they were never here to see it.

In Jack’s critique of being surveilled or observed in this way, he relies on deficit thinking. He may be correct to critique that the administrator observing him has better working conditions

than he, or that he has better pay. But his critique does not stop there; rather than critique these practices themselves, Jack relies on deficit thinking and compares the adults that he interacts with—supposedly drunk, cursing parents—to “civil” communication with “their” adults. Outsiders are detached from more than, or something qualitatively different than, kids and the realities of “normal” schools; they are detached from *these kids* and *these parents*. I wish I had pushed Jack for a particular experience with a drunken parent, but regardless of whether or how often he interacted with drunken parents, Jack represented this kind of interaction as a customary part of what urban school “was like.” In Jack’s phrasing of “the trenches, the kids,” it is also worth noting that the students and “the trenches” are the same thing or seem to be on the same plane; it is not something about school structure or larger social inequities that make up the trenches, but the children themselves.

Even when teachers resisted deficit thinking in some ways, the underlying expectation that urban families were flawed was prevalent. Erica was a TFA teacher in Chicago who was critical of her school’s assimilationist approach. (She thought the history curriculum was detached from students’ lives, for instance, and she disagreed with the administration’s decision to not allow instruction in Spanish.) However, she still saw the families of her mostly Latin@ students through a deficit lens:

Erica: Um, there are schools, charter schools in Chicago that have selective admissions. They have a mandatory test score requirement, like a threshold—90% and above in reading and math, or something like that.

Heidi: Okay.

Erica: That was not the case with the schools I taught at. The first year I taught at Community Charter, um, most of my students—they were just wonderful

kids, but they unfortunately, you know, did not grow up speaking English and had a hard time, especially with the reading. So, you know, especially the structure of the school with it being from Labor Day basically until the end of June.

Erica does not think speaking English in itself is inherently superior to speaking Spanish, but she still sees her students' families as contributing to their difficulties in school. Despite recognizing that students would benefit from speaking Spanish in school and despite critiquing the European slant of the history curriculum, Erica also worried that spending the summer months at home with their families would mean a regression for her students in school.

Project Voice teacher Maddie was another teacher who both employed and disrupted deficit thinking at different moments. For instance, Maddie said once that she believed that many black families did not value education and did not adequately value a "stable" home. As I discussed before, Maddie worried about the adults in her students' lives who drove around with the volume on the car stereo turned up to the "max." She also worried what sitting on the front stoop represented, and criticized black parents who let their children do this. In an interview with Maddie in the year after Garber School closed, at her new school in the district, Maddie discussed a training she had attended to learn about how student test scores figured into teacher evaluations. She described her students' parents as unsupportive:

Maddie: She went over the calculations, how they did it in Philadelphia, and it goes on how many kids live in your household, your income level, all of these things match up to how you should be performing. That's what they're looking for. It's like a whole formula. She went over all these things with us.

Heidi: They're trying to control other things.

Maddie: Which is kind of nice because they're factoring in what we really deal with. If I lived in the suburbs and mom or dad drops me off every day with a lunch every day, picks me up every day and sits with me and does my homework, you're going to have a different outcome. Realistically, we don't get that. That does make a big difference, having support at home.

Maddie might not necessarily see students' lack as the fault of families, but she does see them as *lacking*. The students and their non-suburban families must be dealt with; they are what the teachers "really deal with." There is a not-so-fine line between saying urban students' families are unsupportive and saying urban students' families are not able to support students in the ways that schools—very middle-class places—recognize as support and deem valuable. It was often difficult to understand how the teachers understood this disconnect between families and urban schools, and indeed, deficit discourse continued to slip in as the explanation.

Despite that Maddie held this deficit view that parents did not offer enough support to their children, she said she also had students whose parents were *too* involved and who babied their kids:

Maddie: Yeah, it's nice but because we have those involved parents, they're almost so involved they keep their kids at home. They actually have parents at home or stay-at-home moms here, so when you have stay-at-home moms you have these little boys in here that put on the act, and it's not the girls. The boys in here, we have about ten that miss school all the time. Their ten have moms who work at home.

Heidi: They just want to stay home?

Maddie: Yeah. It's very bizarre. I showed one of them, because he's so smart and does so well on the computers, but then in my gradebook doesn't do so well. I'm like, "I can't grade you when you're not here."

Maddie views her students' parents critically here, but not according to deficit logics. Mothers are to blame, not because they work too many jobs and are "unsupportive," but because they are too supportive and apparently coddle their sons. While Maddie had this experience of seeing her students' parents be "so involved," she simultaneously held onto to the deficit view that urban parents are uninvolved and unsupportive. The deficit discourse remained a powerful, commonsensical lens with which to understand urban students' families, even when experiences like hyper-involved moms cracked and complicated this lens.

Developmental Model

Urban students are not understood uniformly through the deficit discourse. There are of course other discourses, including the developmental model, that circulate within schools and that teachers regularly tap into. A developmental approach dictates what are "appropriate" skills and behaviors for children at particular ages, and it frames children as *in development* to one day become agentive adults, rather than social agents themselves. A particular age or grade level—or, as Sir Ken Robinson put it in a TED Talk video (Robinson, 2010), a student's "date of manufacture"—is supposed to tell us something about a student's interests or capabilities. A developmental model is meant to predict whether students are, as my participants said, ruled by "hormones" and going to act like "knuckleheads", or if they are young enough to be "very much still into school." It materializes itself in the different sets of rules and expectations for different groups of students, like the right to put one's hands in one's pant pockets once in the fourth grade, as Kelly shared was the policy at her school. This approach marginalizes and labels

students who do not meet developmental benchmarks (Collins, 2003; Hehir, 2002); it carries normative power. Scholarship rooted in sociology of childhood and anthropology of childhood points out that developmental approaches to childhood and adolescence are not neutral (James & James, 2004; James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998). The child is a “cultural invention” (Kessen, 1979). These models come out of industrialization, marking childhood as a time distinct from adulthood, and they can adhere to white, middle-class, and other dominant standards. White, middle-class, heterosexual, gender-normative, English-speaking children are the imagined subjects and schooling is made *for* them. (Lesko, 2001; Valencia, 2010).

The urban teachers in this study sometimes used a developmental model in conjunction with the deficit approach to understand and represent their students. These two frames regulated students, producing students as people who were either normal or who were somehow out of bounds. Maddie, for example, gauged students’ interest in school based on their grade: “I’ve had lower grades here since Garber, so I had second [grade] last year, and this year I had fifth [grade]. The kids are very much still into school. They still come every day.” In this instance, Maddie determined that students in lower grades—second and fifth grades—had more interest in school than did her sixth graders whom she had taught at Garber School in previous years, prior to the school’s closing. However, in other instances, Maddie understood student interest—and disinterest—as dependent on the particular school and its values and structures, rather than age or grade level. Or, she attributed students’ supposed disinterest in school as a result of their status as “urban.” Maddie’s different explanations for and ways of understanding students reveal that the deficit discourse, while pervasive and powerful, is not the singular or all-encompassing frame.

Jonathon, a TFAer who had taught in a large urban school district in Houston, Texas, also understood his students through the lens of the developmental model. He said his teaching experience taught him about how adolescents develop and behave:

It definitely taught me a lot about human development, both psychologically and the ways that we do and the reasons why we do what we do as young adults, and as adults, and trying to mitigate the negative aspects that some of the students had in their neighborhoods. At the same time, being able to relate to them or to empathize with them, and to encourage them to make life choices that would positively influence them, to encourage them to resist peer pressure and temptations in a variety of forms.

For Jonathon, age explains part of his students' behavior and outlook. While students might struggle from "negative aspects" of their neighborhoods, he also sees them as heavily influenced by peers and facing other struggles due to their stage in human development.

For Jack, too, the developmental stage of students served as an explanation for much of how students acted, and thus, an explanation for much of what teachers needed to do to attend to students. Jack described some of the difference he saw between teaching in a high school and teaching in a middle school:

Jack: If you don't want to do anything, high school is a great place to be.

Because you can get pushed away.

Heidi: What do you mean?

Jack: Because there's a lot of teachers in high school, so the principal doesn't have as much time to, you know... And you have two planning periods that are 45-50 minutes long, you know? So, it's... Then you have a duty period where you sit around with kids. And the kids are easier in high

school because they're just not in puberty! (He laughs.) Basically, you know? They don't... They're not slapping each other, running down the hall like our kids do, and you need strong teachers in middle school, but we just got them all yanked.

Jack talked about some of the organizational differences between high school and middle school for teachers, such as different amounts of planning time, but the real difference is the difference in age of the students. Jack disapproved of a recent reassignment of some of the school's middle school teachers to high schools in the district, and he believed middle school students need "strong teachers," in large part because of the challenges of puberty. His job as a middle school teacher was more difficult than a high school teacher's because he had to control adolescents' behavior. While the deficit discourse that often serves as a legitimation for control is less present in this moment, here the developmental model offers a commonsensical explanation for why students do what they do instead.

Sometimes I detected the deficit discourse and the developmental model working together in teachers' talk. Teachers constructed urban students as doubly deficient—not only as in-process adolescents who were lacking the competencies of adulthood, but who were also failing to measure up to the hegemonic norms of whiteness and middle class-ness. In the following excerpt from an interview with TFA corps member Erica, a developmental way of thinking about what a fourth grader is like intersects with deficit thinking about urban students' parents:

Erica: Fifth grade my first year, and fourth grade my second year. Um, which is a great age. They're ridiculous, but they're, you know... I think the best

thing about kids that age is that they're old enough to have an opinion, but not so old that they already have an opinion.

Heidi: Okay.

Erica: If that makes sense. Like, they can, but you're like helping them mold their...

Heidi: They're testing it out.

Erica: Yeah. And you really have, you know, you try and teach a second grader about democracy, and they aren't quite sure what you're talking about. At fourth grade, they knew what you're talking about, and they don't already have an opinion on it. You hit them at 8th grade, and they already kind of have an opinion about things. So, I guess it was... Being able to have a conversation with them, and them just saying things and not really (pause) having any sort of (pause) I guess, inhibitions about it. They would just say whatever. And you would be able to take that and work with it. The one hard thing is you can't, you know, be offended at the things they say, or when they something that's completely politically incorrect, or just like ridiculous; you have to be able to work with them and be like, "*Why* do you think that way? Let's have a conversation about it," rather than shutting them down. But, I mean, I remember we were having this, um, this unit study about voting, and of course it was right after Barak Obama had been elected President, and they were talking about, you know, political views and elections and things like that. And they were like, "Well, all the other presidents were whack. But Barak Obama—he's

great.” (She laughs.) You know, we really had to stop and be like, “Well, that’s really—” And one of their parents had said something in passing that had kind of stuck, and they all kind of... And so we just kind of broke it down. And the first time I could have been, you know, like, “Well, what are you talking about?” And George... (in a stern, official voice) You know, “George Washington founded our nation,” or whatever.

(OC: She has a kind of sing-song voice when she is saying, “And one of the *par*-ents had said *some*-thing in *passing*...” She seems to be getting at that the parent had said something she deemed inappropriate or offensive, and that she did not want to directly repeat.)

Heidi: Uh-huh.

Erica: Just having that conversation, or you know, “What are you talking about? You know, how could you forget about President Lincoln?” All these other things. But, being able to have a conversation about that—why do you feel that way, what are you talking about, where are you coming from? And then let’s, you know, reach a common destination where we realize that maybe the first 43 presidents weren’t completely whack. (She laughs.) But you know, Barak Obama is definitely a monumental, meaningful person in our nation’s history, showing us that anyone can be president, no matter what their skin color. So.

This discussion about presidents is a way for Erica to talk about race politics. This passage may also be about “official knowledge” versus other knowledges. Erica seems to implicitly see the knowledge of parents’ of color as something that must be broken down, and she wants the

students to come to a different conclusion—a “common destination where we realize...” Her students have to be persuaded to “realize” her point of view—a more official, less radical point of view—not only because they are constructed as young students whose opinions *can* be molded (developmental discourse), but because they are seen as students whose opinions *should* be molded, corrected from their parents’ influence (deficit discourse). It is not that I agree or disagree that all presidents were “whack,” but this story demonstrates how Erica’s first instinct was to redirect the urban students rather than take seriously why they or their parents might have that perspective. The fact that she pointed to only President Lincoln as *one* president her students might be interested in actually reveals the social fact that perhaps the majority of presidents *were*, indeed, “whack.” It seems Erica’s line about meritocracy and color blindness—“anyone can be President, no matter what their skin color”—is meant to function to show how she is interested in justice and is not racist, despite the fact that she needs to correct her students’ and parents’ perspectives.

While a developmental approach seemed to constrain teachers’ views of their students, perhaps especially when it worked in conjunction with deficit discourse, teachers also used the logics of the developmental model to fight other constraints. For instance, in order to critique the neoliberal push to be productive all of the time, Kelly cited students’ status as young, developing children:

Kelly: The thing I like about this school is they really focus on the whole child. When I was interviewed here, Dr. Dillon, who is the principal here, and I were talking, and she was like, “Kindergartners still need sand tables, and they need water tables, and they need playtime, and they need nap time, because they're five years old.” There would be kids at NYC Uncommon,

they still were expected, five years old, to be at school from 7:00 to 4:00.

That was the school day, 7:00 to 4:00, without a naptime.

Heidi: Wow, and no talking.

Kelly: Just work. What adult could sit at a desk and be talked at from 7:00 to 4:00, and stay awake and be productive and do their best work? I don't know many adults that could do that. I certainly couldn't.

Heidi: Yeah, that's hard. God, five years old.

Kelly: You would see them passed out on the bus, just dead. You'd see the teachers walking them and the kids were falling asleep as they're walking down the hallway. You have to understand, they are still children.

Developmentally and socially, they still need those things.

Kelly argued that because “they are still children” students should not be expected to concentrate and “be productive” for such long hours. Children needed certain resources like sand tables *because* they were children. I also relied on developmental logic here when I exclaimed that “five years old” was a young age to work for so long.

Personal School Talk: The Urban as Different *for Whom?*

The urban teachers I interviewed often referred to their own experiences of schooling to make sense of their experiences in schools as teachers. How do these stories function, and what do these stories mean? Britzman (1986) argues that teachers carry their personal educational memories into the classroom with them and that these histories shape how teachers understand their work: “They bring their implicit institutional biographies—the cumulative experience of school lives—which, in turn, inform their knowledge of the student’s world, of school structure, and of curriculum” (Britzman, 1986, p. 443). Teachers relied on their memories of school to help

determine what was “normal” or desirable in education—what the protocol should be for students walking in the hallway, how teachers should support their students, and how quickly or slowly students should grow up. While the deficit discourse helps to construct the Urban as Other or as deficient, teachers’ “personal school talk” implicitly helps to construct the “norm” of how school should be. (This personal school talk sometimes closely paralleled with the logics of a developmental model, as this developmental approach directed much of teachers’ own K-12 experiences, too.) Teachers often shared stories of their own schooling experiences to offer a *contrast* to what they experienced in urban schools or to highlight what they saw as a dysfunctional aspect of urban education. As Biklen (2004) points out, adults working with children have to negotiate *difference*—differences between adult and child, and in this study often differences between (suburban) school and urban school—“but they also have to engage *connection* because every adult was once a youth” (p. 716, my emphasis). In this section, I want to consider how urban schooling is constructed and represented *by* particular teachers; urban schooling is not simply “bad” or “different,” but it is bad and different *to someone*. Teachers’ stories about urban schooling and urban students and families are as much about those things as they are about the teachers themselves and their perspectives.

TFAer Nisha engaged in personal school talk when reflecting on the kinds of projects she could and could not assign in her history class:

Nisha: Yeah. I’m teaching history, which is probably one of the hardest subjects to teach. First of all, in an urban school, I think I can generalize that, from my perspective, only because the population that I was working with... A lot of history is building off of what people have seen and what they are experienced to and making connections so that you have a context of

where you are. Like, we're in Upstate City. What's the history of Upstate City? What was here before me? What was here ...?

Heidi: Place yourself, somehow.

Nisha: Exactly. A lot of the students, their families that were... Some of the students have parents who were undocumented, and so they had fear. When we've tried to do projects like, "What's your family history?" some of the kids wouldn't want to talk about it because they were afraid that they would be calling out their parents, so there could be issues with that. It also would be really hard for other students who didn't really know who their parents were, or were in the foster care system, or had never met their father before, or had never met their mother before.

Heidi: It's a tricky assignment.

Nisha: That influenced how I taught because I sometimes couldn't do those types of things that I remember when I was in school. I had that project, and it was so much fun. I got to interview my grandma and this and that, but that's not a reality for some of the students in that area.

Nisha perceived her students' education to be inadequate in some sense because she could not assign projects like the ones she had completed as a student. While she constructs her own schooling experience as normal and "fun," her students' schooling and her students' families are constructed as different and less than. To Nisha, these differences in schooling not only constituted deficiency, but it made her job more challenging:

Nisha: But then also, teaching ancient history, they're just like, "I don't care."
You know? They don't know anyone, none of their friends, none of their

family, there's no sense of like, "Why do we care to learn about feudal Japan?"

Heidi: It just wasn't connected to their lives.

Nisha: There was no connection. They've never traveled. A lot of times I would rely on, "Have you been to the museum, and have you ever seen this? Have you ever seen a volcano?" Their context and their prior knowledge is not there. I would have to create prior knowledge, do a little bit of background information, and then be able to teach the entire unit sometimes. It was incredibly challenging.

Again, Nisha constructs her students as deficient. They are lacking the proper middle-class experiences that she assumes children should have and that she herself had growing up. With her own privileged schooling experiences as her starting point, it is hard for her to see that, while perhaps different than the background knowledge she expected, her students *do* come to school with "context" and "prior knowledge." Rather than starting with her students' strengths and connecting the curriculum to their interests, she relies on her own experiences of school and ends up seeing students as not measuring up.

Erica also engaged in personal school talk. She talked about her own K-12 education as "good," and she mentioned the significance of having long-term relationships with her teachers. She discussed the negative effects of testing on teacher turnover at one of the schools where she had worked as a TFA teacher:

Erica: Taking a group of 20 kids and averaging and weighting their scores, and using that as a metric to hire or fire teachers, results in a situation where you have high teacher turnover. And the worst thing about it for me is that

the school I taught in—my first year, that school—I’ve kept in contact with some of the teachers. I know one girl who started there the year before I did, who has taught there now. This is her fourth year teaching there. There are two people there, who started when she did.

Heidi: Oh my gosh.

Erica: She’s been there four years, and there are two people. Where is the institutional knowledge?

Erica frames high teacher turnover, linking student test scores to teachers’ contracts, and the lack of “institutional knowledge” as problems, which she contrasts against her own schooling experiences in the next excerpt. Although Erica had described previously herself as a “numbers person” and had believed in the focus on quantifiably “high quality” teachers, she draws on her own educational experiences to contend that individual good teachers are not everything:

Erica: The schools I went to when I was a kid, I got a *good* education. A *good* education. I didn’t have the best teachers every year.

Heidi: But it doesn’t matter?

Erica: It doesn’t because there’s institutional knowledge, there are teachers who have a chance to perfect their lessons, you have a connection to where you are...

Heidi: You’re not scared for your livelihood.

Erica: Yeah! And not only that, but beyond that, my kids... They are applying to selective enrollment high schools, getting letters of recommendation from

their guidance counselor who's been there for a year. They've known them for six months when they're writing these letters.

Heidi: Oh, right.

Erica: They don't have their kindergarten teacher to write them a letter; they don't have their fifth grade teacher to write them a letter. I'll have the kids add me as a friend on Facebook so that I can write them letters of recommendation.

Heidi: Right.

Erica: Like, they don't have anyone. Their eighth grade teacher who's had them for like six months is trying to write a good and nuanced letter of like, how they've developed as a student? I remember, my second grade teacher came to my high school graduation. Like, there's no substitution for that level of investment in a kid's performance, especially if they don't have that investment at home. So, I don't know. That's my take on that.

In order for her to critique high teacher turnover, Erica depends on her own schooling experiences *and* the deficit discourse; both these frames inform her perspective. I am not arguing that relying on one's experiences of school is simply bad (or good); teachers' own schooling experiences are not inherently dangerous. Rather, a teacher's personal experience of school is one powerful frame that shapes how teachers identify school phenomena as problems (or not), and it shapes how they believe those problems should be corrected. In this case, Erica's experience of having benefited from teachers who stayed employed long enough to build relationships with students helps her to disrupt the neoliberal logics that direct us to individualize and blame "bad" teachers. While Erica had previously adhered to the practice of assessing

teachers based on students' tests, drawing on her own positive school experiences allows her, alternatively, to recognize that teachers and relationships with teachers are important without giving into a decontextualized overemphasis on "high quality teachers."

As I noted, however, Erica also draws on the deficit discourse in her critique of high teacher turnover. Not only is it harmful that her urban students did not have long-term relationships with teachers or teachers who could write good recommendations (as she had), but it is particularly harmful because of what her students are apparently lacking at home—"especially if they don't have that investment at home." Erica draws on the powerful, available part of the deficit discourse that assumes the families of poor students and students of color do not care about their children and their children's education in the appropriate ways, or to the proper degree. The deficit discourse trains our attention away from the injuries of racism and poverty that often do leave urban students and their families "lacking," and instead the individual "bad" urban families are what turn up for discussion. While Erica's own schooling experience is what allows her to start to alter her previous ideas about what it takes to support teachers who will stay engaged with students, the deficit discourse is also at work; Erica in part wants teachers to be able to have strong relationships with urban students because she sees urban students as *especially in need of* strong relationships because she believes their parents are not invested in them at home.

Erica also ends up in the position of the "good teacher." She believes she herself had an excellent education, partly because she had teachers who knew her well and who remained teachers. Of course, TFA teachers can leave teaching after two years, as Erica did, but she shares that she still writes letters for her students. She is able to see herself as a good teacher who does whatever it takes for her students, even after leaving the classroom.

TFA teacher Jonathon also contrasted his childhood experiences with those of his students. He said directly that his own community where he grew up was different from the community where he taught:

Jonathon: These students that I had, they were growing up in some situations where they grew up a lot quicker mentally than I ever did, and saw some things and did some things that I never was exposed to at that age. They definitely had a different worldview than I did. It made it kind of neat to be able relate to them, for the most part. They were 12 going on 25, in most cases. Sometimes that had a negative aspect to it. But, just being able to be open and honest, and for them to express their concerns and feelings about a lot of things, you know, it was good to be there for them.

In saying his students “grew up a lot quicker” than he did, he hints that his childhood was preferable. Jonathon seems to negotiate both the developmental discourse and the deficit discourse in sorting out what a 12-year-old should be exposed to, and what is considered too “negative.” According to the developmental discourse, children are supposed to grow into adulthood at a certain rate, hitting certain milestones along the way, and progressing in a linear fashion. As I explained in the previous section, developmental approaches are always gendered, raced and classed. When educators and other adults refer to what is “appropriate” for children and adolescents of various ages, these expectations are not in a vacuum but are constructed within social systems that position white, straight, middle-class men (or boys) as the implicit norm. When Jonathon said that his Houston students were in “situations where they grew up a lot quicker” than he did, he is drawing on his own experiences as a contrast, but he is also drawing

on the “commonsensical”—and raced, classed and gendered—ideas about children and childhood.

In a second interview with Jonathon, I wanted to know more about how he saw his own community and his identity as a black man, as well as more about the kinds of negative things his students were exposed to. He again said his students had to witness things in their ten years of life that he had not seen in his 20+ years, and that he enjoyed being able to talk through some of these hardships with his students:

Jonathon: Just talking to my students about life, and, as I think I said last time, many of my students experienced things that in 25—28 years now—I have never seen for 10... But you know, like death of a parent or losing a home, being temporarily, or, in some cases, kind of a long-term homelessness...

Heidi: Right.

Jonathon: Just talking, not necessarily about those specific situations, but just how they're dealing with a different perspective on how to still do homework when mom and dad are not around, and when they are living in a car and just being able to ... I hope I did, motivate them to see past their current situation or to ... I don't know how I describe that, but just having conversations with students. I know I use that word conversations so many times, but just informal dialogue with the students was, I think, the best part of the job tangentially in certain cases dealing with academics. It was certainly my focus still, but considering the bigger picture of life and how they fit in it, even as young adults or adolescents.

Jonathon listed some of the situations that his students faced. He himself had not experienced these things, and he did not see his students' experiences as "typical," but he believed discussing these issues with his students was central to his role. In both interviews, Jonathon also talked about engaging with his students' community, despite feeling that he was not necessarily "part" of their community:

Heidi: I think we talked a little bit about how you said that you were able to become part of the student community even though you grew up in a pretty different community. Were you talking about class? I guess maybe talk about your neighborhood or your community growing up.

Jonathon: I grew up in pretty standard, middle-class America, I guess, very, very white. I was always the only minority student in class, like K through 12. But ironically, going into a school that was 50% Hispanic-Latino, 50% African-American, just being an African-American even though that community, so to speak, was one I was a part of, it made it a lot easier for me to fit in or blend in, so to speak. There are definitely aspects of living in a community like that, that were very foreign to me but it still was a natural—gradual, albeit—but a natural transition to just be in that community. I'm not wording that very well, but ... it just came very easily. I am sure in that first year or second year I seemed like an outsider. My students know I was from New York, but I felt like a Houstonian after five years and felt very comfortable in that city and that neighborhood.

As I discuss later in Chapter Six, Jonathon took seriously the task of getting to know his students and their families and connecting with his school's community. Jonathon saw his racial identity

as helping him to fit in with his students, but he still saw his own schooling experiences and experiences growing up as very different from his urban students' reality.

While teachers usually referenced their own schooling experiences as a kind of standard to which schooling should still measure up to, sometimes teachers talked negatively about their K-12 experiences. Jack, for example, said on a few occasions that he wanted to become a teacher to do school *differently*:

Jack: The reason why I got into teaching is because I hated school. I hated it.

Heidi: Right, I remember you said that.

Jack: Yeah, and I wanted it to be fun. I wanted the kids to come to have fun, I wanted to play music, I wanted to jump around the room, I wanted the kids to have fun and learn. I hated it. So, it's just not fun anymore.

At the time of this interview, Jack felt "burnt out" and found it difficult to maintain a level of fun in his teaching like he wanted to—"it's just not fun anymore." While here Jack found some fault with his own schooling, he also engaged in personal school talk that framed his childhood in a positive light—and that framed urban children as flawed. In a focus group with other Project Voice teachers, Jack said, "I have theories, like, I'm a big fan of that kids don't know how to play anymore. I don't think they know how to play at all." Despite wanting to instill fun into school, he bemoaned that he had to teach his students how to play:

They don't know how to play freeze tag! I had to teach them how to play freeze tag the other day. I was like, are you kidding me? I know that's me, you know, "I used to be on my porch and we'd play freeze tag" (in an old-man-crotchety voice, everyone laughing), but still, you know, it's still they don't know how to play. They can't do stuff by themselves.

Jack laughingly noticed he had slipped into a bit of “the good old days” mode, but because his own personal experiences of schooling did not include being taught how to play tag by a teacher, he saw this difference as a kind of deficiency.

Notably, few if any of the wide-range of urban teachers I interviewed talked about their own schooling experiences *as* urban experiences, or as at all similar to the experiences and conditions of the urban school in which they taught. They positioned themselves as outsiders to urban education, in this sense. If teachers did share an urban school practice or idea that was similar to what went on in their K-12 education, this served to legitimate that aspect of urban schooling. Kelly, who was working at a school in New York City, was critical of the focus on discipline at her previous school. When she had been a TFA teacher in Atlanta, she disapproved of her school’s system of “tallies” for keeping track of misbehavior because she thought it made behavior a priority over academics. She seemed to challenge deficit thinking by not assuming urban students were inherently out of control and in need of strict discipline; she saw the tally system of discipline as unnecessary. However, she did support having students walk in lines in the hallways and giving students positive reinforcement for doing so:

Kelly: I remember they had this chart that they would carry in the hallway, it was class compliments, and every time they got a compliment in the hallway we'd move the little clip up because their line looked so good, and I didn't tell them what it had to look like.

Heidi: The line?

Kelly: The line, like the kids walking in the line.

Heidi: Okay.

Kelly: If they were quiet and it looked neat, whatever, and someone gave them a compliment, we'd move it up. When we got to 20, I would bring in donuts.

Later in this interview, I asked Kelly to talk more about what walking in line meant:

Heidi: You mentioned about, was it the other school, where they were giving compliments to your class in line?

Kelly: Mm-hmm.

Heidi: Why is the line important?

Kelly: I think in that case... Well number one, you had to walk in line. I walked in line when I was in school, so I don't think that's a problem. I didn't say that they had to walk a certain way, but you have to be quiet. There are classes going on, the doors are open. You explain that to them, "We need to be quiet because there are other classes learning and we need to respect their learning time." We're moving as a unit. We are a class.

Even though Kelly had previously scorned the requirement for silence and some of the other minutiae of proper hall-walking—"Head behind head, feet together, hands in your pockets"—here Kelly was okay with this practice of walking in the hall because she had grown up doing the same thing. Maybe walking in a line in the hall is not necessarily bad (or good), but because Kelly was accustomed to "doing school" in this way, walking in a line was not something up for reconsideration or critique, in the same way that the tally system was.

Conclusion

While the urban teachers in the study often saw students and their parents through a faulty deficit lens, this chapter examines how teachers also struggled to make sense of real student need outside of a deficit frame. The data discussed here demonstrate that urban teachers

constructed their students as lacking in various ways, and they often perceived urban schooling as implicitly different from and less than “normal” school. This enduring “urban-student-as-deficient” construction reminds us that we have a long way to go in combating deficit thinking in urban schools and elsewhere, but this chapter also suggests that there are nuances in how teachers understand students’ lack, and that the racialized deficit discourse cannot account for all of teachers’ perspectives. Deficit discourse is not a totalizing one. Rather, urban teachers—despite lacking the language to talk about social inequities—sometimes grasped that students were not *themselves* “problems” but that they unjustly faced problems.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Complexity of Urban Teachers' Work in the Neoliberal Era:

Constraints, Control, and Critique

As the teachers I interviewed talked to me about their daily school lives, the complexity of their work was evident. While teachers' views of students in the context of the deficit discourse (Chapter Four), and their relationships with students and ability to challenge the deficit discourse (Chapter Six), are certainly part of their work, in this chapter I focus particularly on the issues that are less directly related to students. Here, I consider a variety of other subjects that teachers brought up when discussing their work, such as, time and schedules; testing and assessment; and administration and other teachers. Teachers described many of these topics as primarily *constraints* to their work. While teachers discussed a range of constraints, I argue that many of the constraints are effects of neoliberalism. However, while, for the sake of organization and analysis, I can artificially separate aspects of teachers' work into student-related versus non-student-related concerns, and I can distinguish between the influence of deficit thinking versus the influence of neoliberalism on their work, it is important to note that for teachers, these sets of concerns were intimately linked. Thus, in this chapter I extract out neoliberal constraints to examine them on their own, but I also examine how teachers' talk illuminated links between the deficit discourse and neoliberalism. Sometimes teachers also shared enjoyable aspects of their work, but they tended to talk a lot about the complications of teaching, even before I asked directly about the struggles they faced. I do not approach their concerns as the complaining kind of "teacher lounge talk" or as "toxins" (Keller, 1999). While this kind of talk certainly happens—inside and outside of the teacher lounge—I want to take the concerns teachers raised seriously. I analyze the different constraints teachers discussed using the two interconnected

concepts of *control* and *critique*; drawing on examples from the data, I first explain these two concepts generally, and then I examine particular work constraints that teachers brought up using these ideas of control and critique.

Urban Teachers' Negotiation for Control

"...I found myself battling for the things that didn't matter a lot, and then before you knew it I was always in battle, and then the things that did matter started to slip, big time." –Andre

As I began coding the times when teachers shared stories about control, I initially had two codes: "control FOR teachers," and "control OF teachers." While this binary was my first impression, a deeper analysis complicates this easy, stable dichotomy. The former code signified moments when teachers seemed to have some control over their work, and the latter represented times when teachers were constricted—by the rules of the school that they disagreed with, by a curriculum not of their choosing, and by continuous pressures to raise students' test scores. I make a distinction between these kinds of constrictions and the times when teachers constructed urban students *themselves* to be obstacles or constraints to their work. Indeed, a main argument I am making is that in understanding students as problems—taking the deficit approach—teachers lost sight of the true structures and practices that compelled them and shaped their work. Thus, it is not "these kids" that made teaching difficult, but it is the explanatory power of the deficit discourse that produces these kids *as problems* that contributed to some of the teachers' struggles; the deficit framework overemphasized urban students as the cause of school problems and misdirected the critiques and concerns that teachers had about their work. (Again, I introduce teachers' deficit-inspired perspectives of students in Chapter Four and discuss ways teachers were able to challenge the deficit discourse in Chapter Six.)

Although I originally had these two opposing codes—control FOR and control OF—I soon realized that it was difficult to think about them separately. In fact, I had actually coded many passages of interview and focus group transcripts as *both* control of teachers and control for teachers. An interview with Kelly, for example, included both these initial codes. Kelly discussed her new role as “Assessment Coordinator” at a private all-boys school in New York City. In this position, she had some control over the testing policies and testing schedules that would affect teachers and students, but she also wanted the teachers themselves to have a measure of control, or to at least be considered in testing decisions:

Kelly: There's a lot of stuff already in place and I think Dr. Dillon has done a good job of researching what's effective and what is actually a good assessment. It's just kind of figuring out what to do with that, but also looking at the calendar and being like, “This month is just testing and is that really necessary, or how can we cut it down, or how can we make it easier for the teachers?” Because I was a teacher for three years. I'm sitting in these meetings, and I'm thinking, “Okay, this is great, but it's not going to be great if the teachers don't give the assessment, if they don't give it regularly, if they don't use the data that it's...”

Heidi: They're not logging it...?

Kelly: Right, so it's two-fold of knowing what's good for the school and knowing what's good for the kids, but also making it workable so the teachers aren't overwhelmed because turnover is a huge problem. Especially in charter schools, because the hours are longer, they expect a lot more, and it is so data-driven that you have to make it workable for the long-term, because

teachers get so overwhelmed. To be honest, that's why I left the previous charter school I was at, not with Teach For America, but the school that I went to after TFA. The hours were like, you had to be at school at 7:15 and you had to stay until 5:00, and a lot of the time you had to stay later than that. I lived an hour away, so I was up at 4:30 in the morning, and it just wasn't sustainable. I became very embittered that I had to not only give up twelve hours a day, fifteen hours a day, but then I would have to get home and do work. On the weekends I would have to do work. I don't think that's fair to teachers, to ask them to give up their entire lives, and then that's the problem—no one wants to stay. Everyone is looking for a way out.

Kelly—and the teachers she is considering—neither fully *have* control nor fully *lack* control. Kelly had experienced the constraints of testing and the realities of long charter school hours as a teacher herself, and she actually left teaching because of them. She seems critical of the idea of loading students' and teachers' schedules with assessments without taking into account their daily responsibilities; she recognizes teachers' lack of control, in a sense, and is sensitive to it. And while Kelly is now an assessment specialist with perhaps more power than the teachers in the school, she still lacks the ability to change the teachers' schedule, for instance, and she must rely on what her superior, Dr. Dillon, decides is a "good assessment."

Because of this complexity in teacher talk, I decided that rather than regard control as something teachers have or do not have, it is helpful to understand teachers' relationship to control as one of *negotiation*. Or as Andre put it, a constant "battle." Theoretically, I knew this is how power works, but I still initially slipped into the idea of individuals *having* power, or not. As

I discussed in Chapter One, my understanding of how power *circulates* is informed by scholars like Foucault (1979), de Certeau (1984), Bushnell (2003) and Sawicki (1994), and I talk more about power and teachers' agency later in this chapter, in the section on "critical talk."

Teachers certainly have more power than students in most cases (Biklen, 1995, p. 19), but teachers often find themselves positioned opposed to students. If a main goal of school is for students to learn and grow—if school is *for* students—teachers do not register as intelligible subjects within school. Their interests are marginal, when considered at all. When Kelly said that "it's two-fold of knowing what's good for the school and knowing what's good for the kids, but also making it workable so the teachers aren't overwhelmed because turnover is a huge problem," she recognizes that what is "good" for students and the school is opposed to what is good for teachers. When we consider neoliberal logics in which the "audit culture" (Apple, 2005) reigns supreme, this disregard for teachers' input and well-being makes sense. Neoliberal discourse promotes efficiency, productivity and individual accountability, and teachers become little more than conduits for high test scores; they are a means to an end rather than an end in themselves. Although neoliberalism appears to be "gender-neutral" (Connell, Fawcett, & Meagher, 2009) there are links to be found between the feminization of teaching and the logics of neoliberalism, that help to shape the construct of the selfless, sacrificing, output-oriented teacher. Although I think Kelly is concerned for teachers' wellbeing and identifies with their struggles for control, she does not stop at the possibility of teachers being "overwhelmed" as itself a legitimate concern. Rather, teachers' sense of being overwhelmed is a concern *because* it might lead to high teacher turnover. Testing and the risk of high turnover becomes a problem *because* it is a problem for the school system or school managers, instead of a problem for teachers themselves. The perspective of managers trumps the perspective of workers.

In Chapter Four I discussed the control of urban students and its roots in deficit and developmental discourses. However, this control of students is not wholly unrelated to the control of urban teachers. I discussed part of the following excerpt previously; this example is indeed about control of students—it is about the emphasis on a strict discipline system in the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) charter school network—but Andre sees the discipline system as something that indirectly controls him as a teacher, as well:

Andre: Their discipline is very visual. Students in many classrooms were expected to... In order to *show* that they were paying attention, they were to sit like this (He mimics the pose, with elbows out on table and hands together.), back to the back of the chair, hands on the desk if you are not holding your pencil, and like tracking the speaker. (OC: I can tell he is critical of this, and I laugh a little bit.) Your eyes have to be following the speaker, or if the speaker is one of your peers who raises their hand. Raising your hand like this (arm not extended up all the way) was a sign of like weak discipline, so you raised your hand like that... (arm straight up). A lot of it, in many instances, was unnecessary, and I know when I was a kid, I would *not* have gone for that, at all. Especially since I was a student who did well, you know. I didn't think I needed to visually show it.

Heidi: And the students are probably critical or know that.

Andre: Of course. They think it's stupid. Yeah, they're not dumb—of course.

Heidi: I can know the answer, this way or this way. (I mimic the different kinds of “good” and “bad” poses.)

Andre: Right. So, that was controversial. At the beginning of the year, my peers at Teach For America envied me because they would walk into the classroom and observe, and the students looked so excited about learning, and they looked all very uniform, so it looks like you have real control.

Heidi: Very controlled.

Andre: Yeah, and I understand that coming from some of the situations where there's like no school-wide structure. I think school-wide structure and culture is important, but I think KIPP may have over-done it. But, if you ask some of the other teachers, they are like, "Well, it may be a decent price to pay for this uniformity," that you can easily pick out someone who's, you know, not following suit.

Heidi: Yeah. It's like surveillance. It is very easy to see who the...

Andre: Yes, everyone else is doing this...

Heidi: A little slouch or something.

Andre: Yeah, but I think I found myself battling for the things that didn't matter a lot, and then before you knew it I was always in battle, and then the things that did matter started to slip, big time.

I empathized with what Andre said about being consumed by little battles. I told him that a colleague and I often talked about catching ourselves, in our research and work with urban students, fighting for things we do not actually care about. I said that I had had moments when I realized I was almost yelling at students and then stopped myself to ask, "Why do I care if you're in a line or not?" Andre continued:

Andre: Right, yeah, they had to be in line. They put tape down the hallways so that the students knew what to walk on to keep the lines straight. They couldn't talk in line. Their lunch was about 30 minutes. They didn't get recess until spring, and they were in school until 4:45 p.m., and they started at 7:45 a.m.

Andre believes that KIPP's policies control students in an "over-done" manner, and he recognizes that his students think some of the strict rules around posture and hand-raising are "stupid." Important to note is that Andre himself has to also submit to KIPP's rules to some extent (and to the deficit discourse that makes such a strict discipline system seem necessary). Even though he said that to outsiders it looked like he had "real control" of his classroom, it was not the kind of control he wanted. Andre himself does not have to raise his hand in a particular way or walk on taped lines in the hallway, of course, but he feels compelled to maintain this discipline system that he opposes, while the parts of teaching and learning that he finds important—"the things that did matter"—fall away. While scholars often examine students as objects of the discourses and structures of school, schools also make teachers into objects of control (Bushnell, 2003).

Critical Talk: Teachers' Critique as Agency

As I described in my methodology chapter, part of my task as a critical researcher is to connect urban teachers' stories to the "structural conditions that influenced the interpretations teachers made of their experiences" (Biklen, 1995, p. 50). This means I need to take their voices seriously but also the discourses which help to produce their voices. Drawing on theorists like Foucault (1979), de Certeau (1984), and Sawicki (1994) is helpful to conceptualize teachers' agency without letting go of an analysis of the power of dominant discourses. I recognize the structural conditions of urban schooling and the neoliberal, deficit, and other dominant discourses that are

central to the organization of daily life in schools, on the one hand, but de Certeau's (1984) focus on "making do" allows me to get at how teachers reproduce and interrupt, resist and maintain the structures and discourses of urban schooling, on the other hand. Again, in order to keep teachers' power relative to their students in mind, I position teachers as sort of "pivot" figures working within complex fields of power. Studying urban teachers means I neither study only "up" nor study only "down"; urban teachers are neither fully oppressors nor wholly victims. (People rarely are.) I examine how urban teachers at some moments use *strategies*—"ways of operating" afforded to those in power—to uphold deficit and neoliberal discourses (de Certeau, 1984, pp. 30-36), and at other moments use *tactics*—the "art of the weak" (p. 37)—to creatively "make use of the cracks" in dominant discourses, and to take the "order by surprise" (p. 37).

To think about critique as a kind of agency, I draw on Foucault. While some feminist scholars, post-positive realists and others have critiqued Foucault for forgoing a conception of agency, feminist philosopher Sawicki (1994) argues that Foucault maintains a theory of agency. While Foucault believes that we do have a "modern sensibility" and that we cannot somehow step outside of power, history or discourse, "this does not mean that one cannot attempt to bring to light the anonymous historical processes through which this sensibility was constituted in an effort to create a critical distance to it" (Sawicki, 1994, p. 351). For Foucault, agency is precisely the ability to "bring to light" this constitutiveness; agency is the ability to point to and—if only fleetingly—to "free a space for the invention of new forms of rationality and experience" (pp. 352-3). Sawicki quotes Foucault in a footnote:

There is always a little thought even in the most stupid institutions; there is always thought even in silent habits.... Criticism is a matter of flushing out that thought and trying to change it: to show that things are not as self-evident as one believed.... [A]s

soon as one can no longer think things as one formerly thought them, transformation becomes both very urgent, very difficult and quite possible. (p. 362)

Urban teachers' negotiation with both deficit and neoliberal discourses was visible in what I am calling *critical talk*. I coded the times when teachers critiqued particular school practices or approaches to education as critical talk. Teachers critiqued a variety of things and from a variety of perspectives—a school's administration, other teachers' pedagogical approaches, a curriculum that promoted assimilation, students who did not assimilate enough, an overemphasis on student discipline, not enough focus on student discipline, and many others. The critical talk of teachers is central to my dissertation because it means taking teachers' perspectives seriously—hearing their talk *as critique* and not as mere “complaints,” for instance—and it highlights both constraint and agency. Critical talk is a moment when teachers create a space for other possible constructions of schooling. Studying teachers' critical talk includes multiple considerations: (a) acknowledging the constraints which teachers currently face; (b) recognizing that things could be otherwise; (c) and examining the discourses that shape *both* their critique and their ideas for how the “otherwise” space of possibility is filled up.

Critique conceived of in this multifaceted way emphasizes the agency of the teachers. Studying their critical talk disrupts the “teacher-is-to-blame” explanation (Kumashiro, 2012) that sees teachers as only objects at fault, and it instead works to position them as subjects of their experiences. Even when teachers felt a lack of control, their critical talk demonstrates how they are never merely or totally objects of controlling discourses. If power both “breaks [the body] down and rearranges it” (Foucault, 1979, p. 138), then in the instance of rearrangement or reproduction there is a space to at least imagine a different possibility of rearrangement. de

Certeau (1984) also uses this metaphor of carving out space and using “cracks” in the dominant order to designate a kind of agency (p. 37).

While teachers’ critical talk highlights this “both/and” moment of present realities and future possibilities, it may not always lead to transformation. Indeed, the urban teachers I interviewed often seemed to trade one controlling discourse for another. Their complex negotiation with discourses—the ease with which a critique or disruption of one constraining discourse led to teachers activating another—illuminates the intersectional (Collins, 1990) and interlocking (Combahee River Collective, 2004) nature of power. I argue that it is especially important to study how neoliberal and deficit discourses intertwine in teachers’ talk, even while trying to examine each discourse individually. Educational researchers have focused on the deficit discourse’s harm for students and on neoliberalism’s harm primarily for teachers as workers, but taking stock of how these discourses function together and maintain one another helps to disrupt the popular teachers-vs.-students framework, as well as helps to imagine possibilities to recreate urban schools that are for *both* students and teachers.

Erica, a TFAer who had taught in Chicago, reveals how deficit and neoliberal logics intertwine and work together in her critical talk about testing. As I describe further in the sections on neoliberal time and on the need to *show* progress later in this chapter, teachers described much of their work in relation to testing and the *measurement* of students and their progress. Despite wanting success for students, teachers often blamed urban students for the problems of school, in part to escape being blamed themselves by a constraining audit culture focused on testing. Erica described herself as a “numbers person.” She, like other some other teachers in the study, struggled to reconcile her negative experiences with testing—she was not asked back to her school after her first year in TFA because of student scores—with her

perspective that testing *should* be tied to her performance. While she became critical of tests, she was critical in particular ways that ended up relying on a deficit view of students, and that allowed the neoliberal logic of accountability to remain largely intact:

Erica: Going into Teach For America, I was so excited that they're using numbers and performance, and this and that, and going into it, I was just like, "Duh! If you're a teacher, you should be good at it, and your kids should be making all this progress," and like, it made so much sense to me. But after *doing* it, it's like... Okay, I had a kid who came in the day of our spring test...

Heidi: Right.

Erica: ...and he had gotten into a fight with his mom that morning, he hadn't had breakfast, he was angry, and he was one of my students who had a 504 plan for his behavior. He had explosive personality disorder, and so all of these things—what would have been like a brush-off-your-shoulder day for anyone else was like enough to make him self-sabotage his test.

Heidi: Yeah.

Erica: The day of, my second year teaching, I was able to convince my principal to let him postpone taking the test for two days.... But really, like my job performance is tied to *this kid*.

Rather than stick with her budding critique of testing, Erica invokes the deficit language of "these kids"—or "this kid"—signaling that testing should work with some students, but not urban students who lack breakfast, who have fighting families, who are "angry," and who have "disorders." The power of neoliberalism makes testing and performance *the* educational

framework, and Erica wants to be successful according to these measurements. To protect herself from blame, she can easily draw on the deficit discourse that is so available to shift the blame onto students. Her talk reinscribes urban students as lacking and constructs them as *unworthy* to be tested, allowing both the deficit discourse and neoliberal logics to continue to operate.

In another example of critical talk, a teacher from Project Voice disagreed with district administrators' understanding of her work. Christine said that all she heard from the district level was talk about the "number of chairs" in the classroom. She was upset that the administrators conceived of teachers' jobs in terms of efficiency and empty seats, and that class size was everything. This teacher knew her work was more complex than that, and for a higher-up to understand the main problem with schools in terms of counting empty seats infuriated her. However, she then reframed the problem as *these kids* in these seats. She was upset that the administrator did not understand that her job was complicated because she had to deal with "these kids." Her critical talk disrupts neoliberal accounting logics, but in the space that her critique opens up, deficit thinking sneaks in; counting seats might make sense if she were teaching "normal kids" rather than this urban "population."

In another interview with Christine, she discussed the challenges she faces in an urban district and the pressures of being designated PLA or "persistently low achieving." Here, she seems to fight the deficit discourse that gives up on "these kids" and sees them as helpless, but her critique of the harsh controls placed on urban schools winds its way back to the responsibility of individual urban families:

Christine: You're being punished for being a city school teacher instead of getting a job in the suburbs. I don't think suburbs are the Promised Land. I guess what I'll say, if you teach an at-risk population you're being penalized. I

really believe... My co-worker...we were saying this the other day. She said this school is full of good teachers, but you wouldn't know it based on our results. I don't think that's a cop out. There could be some people sitting back going, "This is really hard, and how can you expect me to do better? What I'm up against. Look at these kids." I'm not talking about people that have that approach. I said to my students last year...this was kind of an interesting thing. They were really acting up. This was not this group, but this was a good story. I asked them, "Do you know why our school ... why everything changed? Because you know I'm a new teacher, and you know there's lots of new teachers. We put were put on a state list. Do you know about that?" They were like, "Yeah. But we don't know what..." They're fourth graders. I said, "We're called a low-achieving school. I said that means that we're not doing a good enough job, teachers or students. That we have to work hard and we have to learn what we need to know as fourth graders." This one kid says to me... Oh no, when I asked the question at first, their response to me was when I said, "Why did we change the school?" is, "Because we're bad." I said, "Really?" Then I went on and I explained about the PLA, and we have to do more and all this stuff. This other kid said, "That's why no one new comes to this school."

Heidi: No one new?

Christine: No new kids choose to come to this school. That was pretty telling. It's like, no one wants to come here.

Heidi: So did they..? How do you think they meant bad?

Christine: “We’re bad kids. We’re bad overall.” When you look around if I’ve got kids that are all acting out and they don’t have any good role models... I truthfully look at kids in my class and think, your family needs to get you out of here.

Christine distances herself from teachers who have the mentality of, “Look ‘what I’m up against. Look at these kids.’” She also notices a disconnect between what she and her colleague see as a school full of good teachers and bad results, but she seems to buy into the authority of the PLA label and believe that she and the students have to in fact “work hard.” Further, she seems to latch onto the deficit logic that sees urban students’ families as lacking—in this case, lacking “good role models”—and *simultaneously* latches onto the individualistic and middle class approach that assumes parents can and should simply “choose” another school. This kind of thinking is supported in the neoliberal policies of choice and vouchers, as well.

Constraints on Urban Teachers’ Work

Neoliberal Constructions of Time

“[T]ime that is measured by economic productivity has gradually become universal, and efficiency has been set up as a standard in this competitive world” (Zhou, 2012, p. 6).

“To intervene in the name of social transformation means precisely to disrupt what has become settled knowledge and knowable reality...” (Butler, 2004, p. 27).

Anyone who takes seriously the idea that school can be a space to create and recreate knowledge, a site of possible transformation where we interrupt the standard or “settled” status quo, should be concerned with the ways teaching is increasingly understood as merely delivering content *efficiently*. According to neoliberal logics, we must always make good use of time and

prove that we are continuously productive (Apple, 2005). The cult of efficiency has roots farther back than before neoliberalism (Callahan, 1964), but neoliberalism intensifies our ideas about using time efficiently. Throughout the interviews, time was ever-present in teachers' descriptions of their work, and it shaped their perspectives on teaching and learning, their students, and themselves. Teachers discussed school schedules, testing schedules, a lengthened school day, a lack of personal time or time free from work, using time efficiently, keeping students' attention for certain periods of time, and ensuring that students make "adequate progress" or "adequate growth" in a particular amount of time. Teachers usually described a lack of time; they felt pressure to accomplish too much in too little time.

Making work meaningful despite tight schedules. Teachers had little control over their work schedules. They tended to describe their time as regimented, and they spent their days trying to accomplish objectives that were not necessarily of their choosing. Noticing what time was spent on (and not spent on) gives insight into what kinds of activities their schools valued. At Nisha's school in Los Angeles, the way time was restructured into a year-round "track schedule" revealed the inadequacy of the school—its building, resources and staff—to serve the number of students it needed to. Nisha discussed the challenges of the school year calendar she and her students had to follow:

It was a track school, so there were four tracks. I taught A Track, and that is so interesting because our students would be at school at different times. If you're on B Track, you would get a break from February to March; that would be your winter break. A Track was more along the lines of a traditional schedule.

Scaffolded schedules like this affect the kinds of cohesive school culture that are possible (Theoharis, 2009). Beyond dividing the students within the school, the track schedule also determined the teachers with whom Nisha could collaborate:

The students that I had...you know, I taught history, Special Ed history for A track. They would then rotate to the A track math teacher and then the A track... They were all on the same track, my students, so I would have to collaborate sometimes with the teachers on my track. I would never really collaborate with teachers on another track...

While teachers certainly felt the constraints of the way their time was controlled, they did not seem to resist outright against the logics of efficiency; teachers did not imagine extremely radical or alternative ways to structure time at school, for instance. However, within these time constraints, teachers strived to make teaching meaningful and to achieve goals important to them. Nisha saw a large difference between her first and second years of teaching, partly because she used her classroom time differently. She said her second year was “so positive” because she devoted time to getting to know her students, while her first year had been “just so hard”:

Nisha: Then I also, I took my first month of teaching to really get to know my kids, and I think that I didn't my first year of teaching. I just was kind of like, “I have to meet these goals, I have to show this progress, blah, blah, blah.” By the end of the year, I was not able to get there because I was just following the curriculum and not really getting to know my kids.

Made apparent by her laundry list of tasks ending in a disdainful “blah, blah, blah,” Nisha came to believe that her time with students should be used differently. Academics were important to Nisha but could not be successfully pursued without also getting to know her students. The way she described having to take an entire month at the beginning of the year speaks to the degree to

which the rest of the year is regulated—dedicated to simply “following the curriculum”—and *divorced* from knowing students and learning from them. In other words, the school understood the curriculum and making “progress” as completely separate from teachers’ relationships with students and seemed to promote a delivery approach to education, rather than a constructivist or collaborative view of learning. Nisha became critical of making “these goals” and became doubtful about the importance of showing “progress” when these duties were disconnected from her actual students.

Even when teachers approved of accounting practices like standardized tests to measure student progress, they resented that these practices ate up time that could be spent more meaningfully. Jonathon found that he spent a lot of time and energy preparing for standardized tests. Jonathon supported his school’s “accountability-driven” focus, at least in the sense that he wanted his students to achieve, but he also resisted the scripted curriculum and the idea that everything he and his students did was supposed to be in service of The Test. He liked making connections with students and valued conversations with them: “[W]e sat down and we just talked about life.” Jonathon recognized,

Sometimes you're not able to have those kinds of conversations....It's such an accountability-driven...which is a good thing, I do think—student accountability data, accountability for achievement—but you're hands are tied oftentimes as to what you can do and how you can do it, or the constraints of time within the day.

Like Nisha, Jonathon believed in the importance of developing relationships with students, despite that his school’s structuring of time did not reflect that belief.

While teachers struggled to shape instructional time to meet both the school’s expectations and their own requirements in terms of what they thought was worthwhile, teachers

also struggled to find time to complete tasks that they found utterly non-meaningful. Kelly talked about the “extra stuff” she had to do at the all-boys charter school where she had taught:

Kelly: I remember someone said to me, “This is like cleaning up a frat house of 9-year-old boys.” She was like, “I live in a studio apartment with 25 little boys, and every day I have to clean up after them.” That's like one... You know what I mean? It's so many different...

Heidi: Oh, that's just... That's a lot...

Kelly: It's teaching, and it's planning, and it's cleaning, and it's preparing for the next day, and it's making copies, and it's making posters, and it's...

Kelly highlighted some of the backstage work like cleaning and planning that teachers must do, usually outside of the hours of the official school day. Non-teachers often do not recognize the time and effort teachers expend “behind the scenes,” and most schools are not structured around this labor (Darling-Hammond, 2006, pp. 2-3). Kelly also believed that this labor was sometimes invisible even to administrators:

Kelly: There are all of these things that the teachers have to do in school, that you must do at school because of resources or because your classroom is there. Then it's all the extra stuff; planning and data analysis and all that stuff.

Heidi: It's not like you can work from home when... like so many of your friends are.

Kelly: Right. It's not as if you could click a button and something wipes the board down and Cloroxes the desks and... It would be nice but it doesn't happen.

Heidi: Yeah, that's a lot of nitty-gritty stuff.

Kelly: Yeah, it is, and I think a lot of the times administration—and I'm not speaking here at NYC Uncommon—but a lot of the times I think administration forgets that, that there's... They're like, “Well, you could do that at home.” No, actually, I can't because we have to have pencils for tomorrow, and I'm going to have to spend an hour sharpening the pencils here, right?

Heidi: You don't really want to take that work home...

Kelly: It just has to be done. I'm not going to sharpen pencils at home while I'm eating dinner. It's not going to happen.

Kelly found these tasks related *neither* to neoliberal measures of productivity, nor to providing her or her students with any meaning. It seems that spending time on something like sharpening pencils was difficult for her because not only did it not bring her any pleasure, but it also *did not count* for the administration. Under the specter of student outcomes, the process of getting there—whether it is planning or pencil-sharpening—is work that is not visible and that cannot be measured. This work “just has to be done” and simultaneously is not a valued use of time.

Wanting time to “have a life” and looking for a “work-life balance.”

“[A]nyone who works in these public institutions must be seen as inefficient and in need of the sobering facts of competition so that they work longer and harder” (Apple, 2005, p. 15).

Teachers talked about the long hours required by some schools, but many also felt compelled to work during their “free time” or during hours outside of the official school day. Teachers often had to make their work day longer in order to find creative and meaningful ways to spend time with students. Like in many charter schools, Erica's school day was already longer due to extended instruction hours, but she still had to find time for the “behind-the-scenes” work:

“I was with my kids all day. We had extended classroom hours, so all the lesson planning, all the professional development—everything like that was happening after hours.” Of course, this kind of hard-working, “give-it-your-all” approach is celebrated within the U.S., especially within this neoliberal era. In some ways, the teacher who spends time working outside of school performs the quintessential “good” neoliberal subject who labors “longer and harder.” Michelle Rhee celebrated this kind of tireless productivity in her lecture when she shared the story of a “Mr. Murphy,” a “kid who is about 22 or 23 years old” and a TFA teacher. Rhee used Mr. Murphy as an example of an “amazing” teacher who students loved because he would tutor them after school every day at McDonalds and would not leave until students had “learned the material.” Rhee said that when she met this teacher, he looked worn out: “He looks like he’s aged about 17 years in 17 months, right. He has chalk dust in his hair; he has some stains on his shirt...” Rhee—and much of the audience who laughed at this line—seemed pleased that this is what it takes to be a good teacher. Buying students hamburgers, volunteering free time and free labor to tutor students, and becoming haggard in the process is celebrated and labeled “high-quality teaching.” However, this “choice” is not possible or sustainable for most teachers.

Kelly, for example, had experienced this reality of working too many hours and feeling run down. After being a TFA teacher for two years, she left teaching because she felt like her job was taking up too much of her time:

Kelly: I was like, “I’m done with education.” But I’m not. I’m so passionate about it, but at that school I was just like, “I can’t do this anymore.” I’m willing to dedicate my career to this, but I’m not willing to dedicate my life to it. I want to be able to go home and...

Heidi: Have dinner.

Kelly: Cook dinner and meet some friends and watch some TV and go to bed and not have to worry about work until the next day. I want my weekends to be my own. I need that work-life balance.

Kelly said she felt “very fortunate” to be in her new job as “Assessment Coordinator” because she did not have to give up her life in the same way she had as a teacher, but she got to stay in the field of education. Her journey to this new position is not an uncommon trajectory for TFA corps members. It has been argued that TFAers quickly climb to management and leadership positions within districts, charter schools, and state government, and they are able to “smooth” the way for TFA and market-based advancements (Simon, 2013).

There are, of course, many middle-class careers where taking work home and working long hours is expected. However, Kelly recognized that there is a mismatch, perhaps unique to teaching, in the time and effort that urban schools expect from teachers, and the actual value placed on teachers. While teachers are supposed to dedicate their lives to teaching, Kelly understood that teachers are very replaceable, especially when they sign one-year contracts:

Heidi: You said it is very teacher centered, or the teacher is a big focus, if it’s “teach like a champion.” Or no? Do they see teachers as a big piece of it?

Kelly: Yes and no. You would think they do, but then they don’t really care about turnover. There’s a huge turnover. I can’t speak to other Uncommon Schools, but the year before I got to Uncommon, half the staff left. This year I don’t think it was as bad, but a lot of staff leaves. It’s almost like they’re like, “Okay, well we have this teacher and we’re going to teach you how to teach, but if you can’t do it, we have this feeder called Teach For America.” That’s the truth. A ton of teachers at my school were TFA

alums, so they're drawn to these charter-type schools. No, I don't know that they value the teacher. They certainly don't value their time. They try, you know? They try, but they really expect you to dedicate your life to this.

Teacher turnover in urban schools should be a key concern, not only for the sake of teachers' own economic stability and wellbeing, but because research has shown that high rates of teacher turnover are connected with lowered student achievement (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2012). Goldstein (2014) reports on studies that found that, as Kelly believed, TFA does in fact have high attrition rates: "Nationwide, urban teacher residencies have 87 percent retention rate at four years, compared to the loss of nearly half of all new urban teachers over a similar period of time, and two-thirds of Teach for America teachers" (p. 250). Of those TFAers who stay teaching longer, 85 percent leave their initial school for "more desirable schools" (p. 254). While the reasons are multiple and complex, charter schools tend to lose teachers at a high rate. For instance, Zelon (2014) reports on data from the New York State Education Department (NYSED) 2011-2012 report cards to explore attrition rates. New York City charter schools had higher rates of attrition than did the city's traditional public schools. While the NYSED data showed that charters lost about a third to a half of teachers that year (with one Harlem Success school losing 74 percent!), even the less severe rates reported by the New York City Charter School Center were worse than the city's traditional public school turnover rates: 26-33 percent in New York City charter schools, versus 13-16 percent in traditional public schools.

The juxtaposition that Kelly noticed—of tall expectations for teachers and low levels of concern or commitment in return—may indeed be starker in charter schools and other urban schools where one year contracts leave teachers relatively unprotected, but this rhetoric of

wanting “high quality,” long-working teachers and the actual treatment of them as disposable is common and finds its way in public urban schools, as well.

Andre definitely felt like his outside-of-work life suffered while he was teaching at KIPP, in large part because of the long work day. He half-laughingly said, “At KIPP I was like this shell of a human.” He compared himself to the teacher in the film *Half Nelson* (except for the drug use part), where the smart, critically-minded, well-intentioned teacher shows up to his urban school scruffy and often not as prepared as would have liked: “I wasn’t smoking crack, but there were some painful parts of that movie because I was like, ‘That was me!’” Andre highlighted some of the differences he noticed between two schools where he had taught:

Andre: I definitely had one morning where I woke up on my couch and I was like, straighten up the tie and go to school. (He laughs.) Same outfit. But at the next school, I got out at 3:00 p.m. and coached football. I had a 30-minute drive home and still made it home before I would have at the KIPP school that was a 10-minute drive away. I saw the sun when I was... (He laughed a little.) That doesn’t mean... There’s studies that show that being able to see the sun helps you with your depression.

Heidi: Definitely.

Andre: I saw the sun. I was outside coaching. There was more sun, I was drinking less. I had time to go for a run after school, before I did lesson plans. It was just more healthy. Because no one was peeking their head into my classroom every second, I was able to have real conversations with my kids for 10-minute chunks of time when I was like, “Alright, let’s take a break. You’ve been working hard.” You know? And it was that season that

the Saints won the Super Bowl, so we would always take breaks to talk about football, then get back on it.

Heidi: That's nice.

Andre: You couldn't waste a second in a KIPP classroom.

Not only did the long hours affect Andre in negative ways, but the surveillance and the heavy time-on-task culture of KIPP took its toll on him and his ability to teach students. At his second school, he felt he had more control to define *how* he wanted to be productive with students—to reasonably expect that his students might be interested in the Super Bowl, for instance, and deciding that taking the time to chat about football might be beneficial to his students, even if it did not *look* productive.

Erica also found that she had needed to spend time outside of school in order to be a successful teacher. She noticed that while she could give teaching her all as a new, young teacher—“When you’re new and shiny and happy, you can put in a hundred hours a week”—this was an unsustainable practice:

Erica: But you can do that when you’re 23.

Heidi: Right.

Erica: You can do that when you’re 28. If you’re a career teacher and you’re on, you know, in your forties, how do you do that? And so, I mean, I started teaching when I was 21, I had 100 hours a week to spare, I made it work, I put everything into it, my kids loved me. Because I was able to give it 180% in the classroom.

Heidi: Right.

Erica: Could I have done that after six years?

Heidi: Yeah. Could you have a family?

Erica: Could I have a family, could I have a life, could I...

Heidi: Could you sleep? (laughs)

Erica: I didn't see my family. I didn't talk to my mom for three months at one point while I was teaching. I lived five hours from home, and I got home twice in a year. I didn't have a boyfriend. I didn't have friends in the city. I didn't go out. I went out Saturdays. I worked all day Sunday and all day Friday; I went out on Saturdays and met with friends.

Erica did not like using most of her free time on teaching, but she realized that as young teacher without children or a significant other, she could do so more easily than teachers with families. She also recognized that “shiny”-ness had something to do with her ability to give it her all, and she wondered if after six years she would feel the same.

Besides teachers, what other workers or professionals have “sky-high expectations for their work” (Goldstein, 2014, p. 263)? Are the people in these professions respected and paid similarly to teachers? Are they trained in comparable ways? While teachers are persuaded by the idea of a professional identity and while they often identify “up to elite professions rather than down to working-class positions,” teachers may be missing how increased accountability does not actually translate into “increased professionalism” (Biklen, 1995, p. 30, using Apple, 1983). Teachers want to be compared to doctors and lawyers (who also work long hours), but saying teaching is a profession has not seemed to change the ways teacher work is *controlled* by non-teachers. Ingersoll (2003) argues that while the work of teaching young people *is* complex, many teachers face a system intent on *deskilling*, and thus devaluing, their work. This kind of divided and deskilled labor constructs teachers as “interchangeable, low-skill technicians,” and teaching

becomes merely “the rote implementation of prefabricated packages designed by the experts” (p. 157). This deskilling does not happen to the fields of law and medicine. Other scholars notice additional differences between teaching and other professions. Ellis and Orchard (2014) suggest that the knowledge base in teaching is contested in ways that other professions’ bases of knowledge are not, perhaps because teaching is “so clearly linked to the state” (p. 8). Goldstein (2014) also sees differences between the centralized training and goals of medicine, for instance, and the multiplicity of views and approaches within education (p. 265), and she recognizes that teachers’ salaries do not grow at comparable rates with other professions.

Despite the asymmetries in pay, respect and trust between teachers and other professionals (or perhaps because of the desire to be *seen* as valuable professionals), working long and hard still appealed to many teachers. Some teachers seemed to embrace neoliberal ideas of “giving it your all” more than others and did not necessarily resist spending increased time working. Maddie, for instance, considered staying after school as a mark of being a good, “invested” teacher: “I just... Here, if you are really invested... Like the teacher next door, I love him. He really cares. He stays after school; we go over the data together.” Maddie also noticed that she often talked about and thought about her teaching outside of school. When other people did not talk about their work, she saw that as a sign that they did not like their job:

I mean, it’s funny because Stacy, my friend down the way [colleague down the hall], she teaches second [grade]. Her friends teach at [two nearby suburban schools]. They don’t have what we have. We love working. We love going to school. They kind of just go to work. Her and I are like, “Oh my gosh, this student made so much...” and that’s how we are. The whole way to Florida last year, her boyfriend wanted to shoot us because it’s... Tina, Stacy and I all taught second last year, and I was talking about all the kids the

whole way down there. And he's like, "If I hear one more word about teaching..." and I'm like, "Sean, it's just because you hate your job. I'd hate my job, too, if I did logistics with the airport."

Maddie's willingness to work after hours and the pleasure she gets from talking and thinking about work highlights the complexity of navigating neoliberal discourse. On one hand, we could say Maddie is completely complicit with neoliberalism—she has taken on a neoliberal subjectivity and has perhaps had to lie to herself and say she actually likes being continually productive to cope with neoliberal demands (Layton, 2010). However, on the other hand, she proves false the neoliberal assumptions about public school teachers and other public workers—that they are unmotivated, lazy, and in need of overseeing. She exemplifies what activist teachers argue in the face oversight measures like the Common Core Curriculum Standards—that teachers actually *already* work long and hard to teach students, and that surveillance and strict accountability of teachers' work is misguided.

Other teachers, too, seemed to happily devote their "free" time to their students and to other teaching-related duties. Nisha, for instance, liked that she got to know students through working in the "Boys to Men" program. This was an important part of her job, despite that it was after school hours. Jonathon took his relationships with students seriously and said some of his favorite parts of teaching happened after hours: "That was one thing that I definitely enjoyed about teaching. So much of the education, so to speak, happened outside of the classroom, outside of the lessons, formally planned lessons. That was something that I loved about that job." He was especially proud of a community gardening project he helped to start:

It was just a Saturday morning, every Saturday, but it involved everyone, so to speak, in that community: teachers, parents, siblings of the kids in the school and administration. It

was reflective of the school's commitment to being a part of the whole community, not just being a nine to five, Monday through Friday establishment.

I was struck by the fact that so much of what teachers found important and liked about teaching happened *outside* of school hours. Jonathon enjoyed the connections he started to make with parents and the community. He also thought that because of “the negative aspects that some of the students had in their neighborhoods,” having the chance to build strong relationships with students was especially important. While transcribing this interview with Jonathon, I wrote the following observer comment:

OC: When he was talking about all of the work and learning that goes on *outside* of the classroom, and outside of the hours of school, it made me think about two kinds of questions. We can ask about what is going on *in* the classroom that *prohibits* this kind of learning and relationships that he likes, like the strict accountability model that we discuss later in the interview. But I also think back to Lois Weiner’s critiques about being asked to work outside of school, and think that I need to ask questions like, what is it about *teachers* that make them so available or vulnerable to work longer and harder? This is a place where feminization of teaching and neoliberalism work together; teachers are expected to do a double shift almost, which coincides with their dual roles of strict teacher who must produce scores, and also the caring teacher who must care for students, *especially* the students who ostensibly have “negative aspects” of the neighborhoods to deal with and who grow up too quickly...)

As I had started to work out in the “OC” above, Jonathon makes sense of his labor outside of school through the logics of neoliberalism and deficit thinking, as well, perhaps, as the gendered notions of teaching. The fact that, possibly, the most central part of his teaching takes

place outside of the classroom is a result of all three of these forces. Jonathon loved the parts of his job where he could connect with students. He seems like a very caring person, and I do not doubt he would care about any students that he taught, but deficit thinking helped to construct his students as especially in need of care. While he was critical of the “teach to the test” mentality at his school and critical of scripted curricula, he still said that a school being “accountability-driven” was a good thing. His school’s low scores were *how* he understood his being at the school—because the school actually was well-funded and supported. He believed in the scores’ meaning, and he also believed that his students faced “negative” aspects in their neighborhoods, so *caring* about them not only became very important, but it became something that *necessarily* must take place outside of the official school hours and curriculum (which are devoted to raising scores). His ability to navigate these forces and perform this double shift helped position him as a “good teacher”—one that works hard and long to do anything for “these kids.”

Making progress and maximizing time with “these kids.” The neoliberal demand for teachers to use time efficiently intensifies when they are teaching urban students with presumed behavioral and academic deficiencies. If students are on the verge of becoming “out of control” at any moment and are perpetually “behind” or “below” benchmarks, the neoliberal logic to maximize time becomes more entrenched. The language around “making progress,” “progressing at adequate increments,” getting “behind,” and “being behind grade level,” was prevalent in teachers’ accounts of their work. These hallmarks of neoliberal time and their impacts on teachers’ work are worth examining on their own, but perhaps even more significant to consider is what happens when these ways of marking time intertwine with deficit constructions of urban students as lack.

Andre's school conceived of and measured knowledge by time: "We want you to learn about two years' worth of information in one year." This mode of time shaped learning as something to get through quickly, but it also impacted how student behavior was controlled and understood. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, Andre was critical of KIPP's focus on discipline and control, and many students were, too, but he thought school leaders actually made an effort to justify to students why they set up such strict rules. Here he explains that if the focus on discipline seemed like overkill, it was just because they needed to "maximize" learning time:

I think the way they communicated it to the students.... [The administration] almost admitted that it was unnecessary, but it was a good sacrifice to make to keep things in order and moving quickly so that you can maximize your learning time. A big appeal that they were always making to the students was, "We don't have much time. Not all of you, but a lot of you are behind, and we want you to learn about two years' worth of information in one year. We're transparent about that, even to you, little kid. So, do these things so we can get through the information quicker, and you can stuff more info into your head."

A "get through the information quicker" and "stuff more info into your head" banking approach does not allow for a lot of relational learning or knowledge building together between teachers and students, but it also raises the stakes for what is considered student misbehavior. This pressure to *get through quickly* means any student input or question can become "misbehavior." Despite Andre's efforts to not focus on controlling student behavior, and despite the administration's intentions for student progress, the logics of neoliberal efficiency position students as objects of control. In other words, even when educators are able to disrupt the deficit

discourse and its rationale for controlling poor students and students of color, neoliberal discourses of efficiency can offer other justifications for control.

Later in this same interview, Andre reflected on what he saw as his struggle with student discipline, and he illuminated a relationship between the impulse to tightly control students' (and teachers') time and the pressure to control their behavior. He had listed accountability for students' test scores and some difficulties in his personal life as major pressures he faced, but he added that "student discipline" was another challenge in his first year of teaching:

Andre: I think it was student discipline. I struggled tremendously. Basically, when you're not organized—and I wasn't organized the second semester—the discipline is probably the first thing that falls apart because the kids are waiting for you. In their other classes, they're used to the 50-minute period moving like that [snaps his fingers]. They're just used to... I think it was actually 90-minute periods at the KIPP School when I was there. They're used to one thing after the other. They're like, "Look under your seat. Oh, there's a packet taped under your seat." Not that serious, but I'm using that to illustrate...

Heidi: And then someone comes and does high-kicks through the...

Andre: Right, just everything planned, mapped out, and executed perfectly. My execution was like, "Oh, where are those papers? I can't find them," and in the meantime one kid throws a piece of paper at another kid, and another kid is like, "What! I'm going to kick your ass!" Those were the kinds of things that happened when the teacher was looking for stuff. I would try to delegate responsibility, like, "Here's this packet. You keep this in your

desk. As soon as I look at you, you pass them out,” and on my good days, where I got eight hours of sleep, that's what my class would look like. But on my normal days, where I got six or five, it was a mess. That's when behavior and discipline got out of control; the students started slouching and almost fighting.

Underlying his concerns about discipline is the notion that each moment must be accounted for; Andre and the other teachers at the school must be *on* at all times. Of course, being prepared and organized is important for any classroom to run smoothly, but this level of execution and management of every minute reflects not only a view of students as passive learners, but it also reflects a deficit view of students who will become “out of control” if given a moment of freedom or a moment without direction from the teacher. Rather than learning as an engaging process for students, learning becomes more like a controlled string of tasks that the teacher asks the students to get through efficiently—and without their supposed inclination toward misbehavior (gasp—slouching!) cropping up. Andre was critical of this quick, “one thing after another” pace, and he recognized the constraints it put on him. However, instead of sticking to his critique—instead of using “tactics” to disrupt this dominant discourse around time and perhaps imagine how classroom time could be structured differently—it seemed easier to use the “strategy” provided by the deficit discourse that time must be structured this way because urban students’ behavior was bound to get out of control (de Certeau, 1984).

When I had made the remark to Andre about teachers doing “high-kicks” through the classroom, I was thinking back to an earlier focus group we had held with the Project Voice teachers. These teachers were also critical of the “getting through” mode of learning, and Christine said she felt pressure to be an “entertainer”:

Christine: Right, um, or I don't know, I'm just thinking of those kinds of things, but there's this sense that we're either having fun *or* we're doing math. You know what I mean?

(There are a couple of reaffirming "mm-hms" from the group.)

Christine: And I feel like it's getting more and more like that, and I mean this is something I do all the time; I'm trying to figure out, okay, how do I get them to do this but not see it as something to just be done with? And this is constant, and I feel like it gets worse.

Sari: I think that's the key, in fact.

Christine: I've joked... I've joked that I feel like, you know, I'm an entertainer (laughing) which I'm not, but I think in your (gesturing toward Jack) class, I remember one time I had them, and I was teaching something, and I was like, "Never mind, get up!" You know, and they... I thought, "I'm nuts" (laughter from others). I'm spending my time going, "Okay, what do we do now? This isn't working."

Christine felt like she had to be on at all times and continually jumping from activity to activity, task to task. We should expect teachers to be "on," but I can hear from Christine the lack of meaning and control that she has in choosing how to teach and what to spend her time on. She had said at another point in this focus group, "I feel like a three-ring circus." She wanted to make teaching fun and meaningful for her students so they would not disengage and waste time, but also she resisted the idea that learning was "something to just be done with."

While I had heard Christine's comment that "it's getting more and more like that" as a hint that she was noticing increased pressure to be continually productive and efficient, it seems

like she also slipped into a deficit framework that blamed urban students for the change. From her perspective, the “constant” need to “just be done with” tasks seemed “worse” not just because she was experiencing a shift toward neoliberal values and practices, but also because she was getting more of “these kids” in her classroom:

Christine: I think more and more we’re getting these kids. I’ve joked that you used to have a few kids that were on you, wanted your attention. Now it’s like half the class is on you. They want your attention, and, you know, usually you think kindergartens, first graders, it’s more physical than fourth, fifth, sixth. But fourth grade, they’re on me, you know, they want *you*, they want your attention. *Or* they don’t want anything or depending on the time of day they want this stuff, they don’t want to have anything to do with learning. So how do you bring it to learning?

Jack : Because all that matters is next week, the testing.

Christine: Right!

Jack: Test scores.

Sari: That’s right.

Christine: That’s just it, and I think that stinks! It’s completely... We’re not teaching, if we’re preparing them for, well no, I shouldn’t say that. I have always felt that if you teach well they’ll be ready for any test. Well, that’s not really realistic anymore because if we’re teaching here and their skill level is here (gesturing with hands), you can’t get them here if you don’t take care of this, but you’re being demanded, it’s being demanded that this is where you are. And it’s unrealistic, and then if you take into account other

things like ESL students, that's just downright criminal that they're making them take these tests.

Jack: Christine and I were talking...

Christine: It's endless!

Christine and Jack weave back and forth between a critique that directly targets an overemphasis on testing, and a critique that implicitly targets urban children. When teachers are under pressure to address a lot in a little time, it seems easy for them to blame urban students—seen as needy and suffering from a lack of adequate attention from parents. Even though teachers are critical of testing and the ways it has shifted teaching toward a “getting through” mode, the legitimacy of this mode of efficiency endures when the deficit discourse is so available to construct “these kids” as the real problem.

I am not arguing that students and teachers should somehow not be making progress, or that students and teachers should not have some level of accountability over time. Rather, I am concerned how efficiency and productivity have become *the* central goals, and how a neoliberal conception of time changes the process of teaching and learning. Olsen (2014) argues that the call for efficiency and effectiveness have longer histories; while the “hyper-rational perceptions of teachers’ work linked to technical processes yielding measurable outcomes are nothing new, ...the extent to which teachers and teacher educators are now held accountable by high-stakes tests and sanctions in the United States is new” (p. 80). Teachers had to navigate between the ever-present call for “progress” that is a top-down, artificial kind of accountability and is more about surveillance, and the kinds of progress that *they* wanted to make and found meaningful. Maddie shared components of teaching for which she believed teachers should be accountable:

Do the kids respect you? Do you respect the kids? Do you make connections with the kids? Do you build a foundation before you start teaching? Do you find that that makes a difference in your teaching? Which it does.

If she were deciding how to measure student and teacher progress, she would include these features of classroom culture and teacher-student relationships. She continued to describe how she thinks about and performs progress in her classroom at her current school:

In here, again, I'm still strict, just like I was at Garber, but the kids see their progress.

I've been so much better at keeping data to show the kids. "This is what you got the first time, this is what you got the second time, this is what you got the third time." They know that they are making progress and where they need to be by the end of the year, so they're motivated. That's exciting to see. Because when I show them, "You're only two points away from passing this," and they're like, "What? Two points?" I'm like, "Yeah, so you're going to have to step it up." Even [the student teacher has] seen with me, it's not ...you don't have to be a scholar. I just want you to make progress.

Here, the specter of progress can certainly be detected, and the "two points" emphasis may partially outweigh the process of learning. Many scholars (e.g., Biklen, 2007; Slattery, 1995) argue that the *process* of education is important and should not be usurped by outcomes: "[T]he ideal is that the means of getting to the conclusion are as important as the results" (Biklen, 2007). However, Maddie works to make the showing of progress, as required under neoliberalism, meaningful and exciting for her students. She sees data as something *for* the students rather than merely evidence of productivity for a higher-up official.

In addition to their students' progress, teachers also talked about their own progression over time. Especially for TFA teachers, their first year of teaching was a not-so-distant memory

for many of them. They said that while they were missing some knowledge and various skills their first year of teaching—classroom management skills, the confidence to ask veteran teachers for help, and the knowhow to talk to parents, as examples—they experienced a much smoother second year. They felt they had grown as teachers. For Nisha, as I discussed earlier, deciding to dedicate time to get to know her students was part of her own development over time. Even Michelle Rhee, when asked about her own years as a TFA teacher, told the audience at her public lecture at Cornell University, “My first year, I sucked.” Rhee implicitly acknowledged that progression was something she herself experienced over time, but earlier in her lecture she demonstrated her view that other teachers do not deserve the luxury of time:

... [A]n elected official said to me, “Don’t you believe, Miss Rhee, that it is possible to improve a teacher’s practice? For example, if they’re not so effective, you can professionally develop them and you can *make* them more effective?” And I said, “Perhaps. But let us not let children languish in their care in the meantime.” I said, “Because my two children attend DCPS schools, and I can tell you that if I showed up for school one day and the principal said, “Welcome to school, here’s Olivia’s teacher, and guess what? She’s not so good. But, we are going to spend this year professionally developing her! To see if she can get better! Well maybe she and her 23 classmates aren’t going to learn how to read, but we think that’s the right thing to do for this adult.” I could never accept that for my kid. No one in this room would ever accept that for your children, but we have scores of kids in this city who do not have the adult advocates in their lives, who can navigate the system and pick the teachers that they want, and that sort of thing, so these kids are literally languishing in these classrooms.

Here, Rhee myopically focuses on supposedly ineffective teachers as the problem in DC and ignores realities of poverty and racism. She also derides professional development for teachers and sets it in opposition to urban students' best interests. She sees professional development through the neoliberal lens of time is money (or scores)—as simply a bad investment and a waste of time. In conjunction with deficit thinking—that urban students are assumed to lack adult advocates, or at least the kind that see picking their children's teachers as the only acceptable form of advocating—this idea that time must be used efficiently and effectively gains even more traction.

Other Teacher Talk: Constructing “Other” Teachers as Constraints

Kumashiro's (2012) book, *Bad Teacher!*, examines how blaming teachers has become *the* commonsensical perspective when considering the problems of schooling. Many popular culture texts, such as the educational documentary *Waiting for Superman* (Chilcott & Guggenheim, 2010), certainly employ the teacher-blaming approach. In this film, scary music plays when the discussion turns to teacher unions, and its “dance of the lemons” animation depicts a seeming epidemic of administrators simply moving “bad” teachers from school to school. Popular representations like this further the notion that public schools and their teachers are presumed problems; people widely accept that teachers are deficient and in need of fixing (or firing). Polls measuring the public's satisfaction with schooling in the U.S. repeatedly find the same result: Respondents say schools in general—“other” schools—are bad, but they rate their children's own schools relatively highly. The urban teachers in my study performed a similar move in regards to “other” teachers or teachers in general. Although they did not blame themselves or see themselves as bad teachers (and although they commonly felt the brunt of this

blame), teachers also took up this commonsensical discourse of blaming *other* teachers, what I call “other teacher talk.”

In this section, I describe the various and shifting ways urban teachers talked about other teachers, and I consider the discourses they navigated in doing so. Teachers shared singular, extreme cases of bad teachers to prove how “bad” teachers really are. Teachers often drew on neoliberal logics when engaging in other teacher talk and upheld ideas around competition and strict teacher accountability—other teachers were bad *because* of poor test scores, or poor quality teachers remained in schools *because* of overstepping unions. However, at times teachers resisted this commonsensical view of the inefficient, ineffective teacher and were critical of the emphasis on standardized testing and “cookbook” styles of teaching. Teachers I interviewed also criticized other teachers for practices that neoliberal, market-based school reformers might *not* care about so much—having low levels of respect for urban students and families, for example. Teachers’ other teacher talk also implicitly helped uncover their views of the “good teacher,” and their stories about other teachers often functioned to construct themselves as “good.” And while other teacher talk proved to be predominantly negative, in some instances my participants also highlighted teachers they admired or relied on for help improving their own practice.

Extreme examples of “bad” teachers. Sometimes the teachers I interviewed presented extreme cases of “other teachers.” They shared “crazy” or “horrible” stories about what other teachers did or said to demonstrate to me how teachers are, in fact, deserving of blame. It is not that teachers did not actually experience these other teachers or that these “horrible” instances did not occur. Teachers often had legitimate concerns for students being taught by teachers who they saw as less than adequate. Nisha, for instance, shared a rather extreme case of the “bad teacher,” but she also was critical of teachers’ negative tones and low expectations for students.

Nisha had been discussing an instructional “coach”—not employed by her school district—who she respected and saw as a mentor, but she immediately contrasted this with other teacher talk:

I think there were a lot of teachers that were incredibly helpful, and there were some teachers that I would not let near my kids with a 10-foot pole. Because I’ve seen horrible adults say horrible things to students who don’t deserve it, and they can get away with it because of such lack of oversight in their school.

Nisha said she thought some teachers were harmful to students. She is rightly critical of teachers demeaning their students, but she also constructs teachers as in need of “oversight”; other teachers try to “get away” with things. When I asked her to provide some examples of particular incidents or things teachers had said, she started with an extreme case:

Nisha: Yeah, I mean, in the time that I taught, there was one teacher that was caught sleeping with a student, and so he was put in jail.

Heidi: A teacher was sleeping with a student?

Nisha: Yeah. An eighth grade student. Yeah. There was that kind of crazy stuff happening at the school level.

Kelly shared another extreme example of “bad” teachers. Instead of talking about a personal experience, she mentioned she had read about the cheating scandal in the Atlanta Public Schools and highlighted that teachers had “test changing parties”:

They almost lost their accreditation. I can't remember if the... Unbelievable, what teachers are doing. Maybe if you put that much effort into actually *being* a teacher, you know what I mean? You wouldn't have to do that, or if a child really doesn't get it at the end of the year, you really think you should pass him onto the next grade? Or should that

teacher... Still, if you're showing consistent years of bad test scores, that does say something about a teacher. Not everything, but it does say something.

Her comments here function to blame individual teachers; the teachers are available as targets of blame while the constraints of testing (even if test scores do not say “everything”) are not. While Kelly was critical of how much time and effort it took for her to be a successful teacher, as I described earlier, she has no problem assuming that these other teachers simply must not have been putting in “that much effort into actually *being* a teacher.”

Neoliberal logics upheld and resisted through other teacher talk. Not all other teacher talk was as extreme as the previous examples. Teachers engaged in other teacher talk in navigating neoliberal discourse, especially in dealing with logics and practices of competition. When Michelle Rhee told the story of Mr. Murphy, the “good,” neoliberal (but rapidly aging) subject, she also told the story of the “bad” other teachers Mr. Murphy had to deal with:

So I go up to him and say, “Hey, you know, the kids absolutely love you, are you going to stay? You know, past your Teach For America commitment, are you going to stay?” And he said, “I don’t know.” And I said, “Why not?” And he said, “Because the people here hate me.” He said, “You know, they keep telling me, ‘Stop coming to school early, stop staying so late, don’t do the McDonald’s thing, it’s not in our contract, you know, you’re making us look bad, stop doing all that stuff.’ So I’m trying to do the right thing and a lot of people here don’t want me to do those things.” He said, “I just don’t know if I can continue to do this job and do it well when I just don’t have the support that I need.”

I have written about how this story demonstrates a neoliberal redefinition of “support”: “Support is not compensation or adequate time and means to teach kids in school, but it becomes simply a pat on the back for doing *outside* of school what could, potentially, be done in school” (Pitzer,

2010, p. 71). This story paints individual other teachers and union contracts as the problem. Rhee does not cite Mr. Murphy's exhaustion as a reason he might leave teaching but instead blames other teachers and pits Mr. Murphy against them.

TFAer recruiter Leah also engaged in other teacher talk in relation to unions. She mentioned the efforts of Rhee and others in DC to de-unionize and introduce merit-pay schemes:

Once you're tenured, you can't be fired, unless you do something wrong, basically. So performance—not that it doesn't matter—but you can't get fired because of performance. So they want to de-unionize because, um, unionized districts, there's no incentive to do better because you don't really get a raise. You get raises as you get older. You don't get in trouble if your kids aren't meeting their goals. You're just kind of like, there. In her district, she wants to make it that if you have significant gains, you get more money, and you get more raises and more benefits. So it weeds out the bad teachers. You can't fire teachers right now. Like, at all.

Leah sees unions as protecting teachers who are implicitly bad and unmotivated to “do better.” She uses a neoliberal lens in suggesting that incentivizing teachers and monitoring their performance more closely will improve schools.

Teachers also used other teacher talk when there were few opportunities to collaborate with other teachers. Erica linked her limited relationships with other teachers directly to the neoliberal logic of competition, a logic that was put into practice through emphasizing and comparing teachers' student test scores and through eliminating tenure. Erica said that as a new and young teacher, she could work long and hard to have success with her urban students but that “every other area of your life starts to suffer”:

- Erica: Including your ability to relate to other adults at your school. Because you don't see any of them all day long; you're with your kids all day long. So I didn't really know any of the other people I worked with because you don't have that interaction. You're with your kids. So, I mean, when I would be in a meeting with my principal, it would be frazzled, you know? "I just spent an entire day teaching, these are the problems I'm having." There was no sense of give-and-take or communication.
- Heidi: Collaboration, yeah.
- Erica: Yeah! And so, it's harder to relate to peers. It starts to hurt other relationships, which I think makes you less satisfied, so like there's... There are just all of those dynamics that go into it, so when you start to think about how teachers in it feel, imagine that it's you in a classroom and 30 kids, you have no peer-to-peer interaction all day—it starts to feel like a battlefield.
- Heidi: Yeah.
- Erica: And it's you against everybody else. I need what I need for my classroom, and then you pit test scores against one another, and it's a competition. So, it's highly competitive when you're in these schools, even between teachers.
- Heidi: Yeah!
- Erica: And when they compare you, and it's like, "Okay, midterm test results are in and Ms. Sands, you're above Ms. Schiller by x amount in reading, and she's above you by x amount in math..." You know, it's like being in law

school but being a teacher, and the end result is that all the lesson plans and all the projects and all the collaboration that you should be doing should be going to benefit students, and everything should at the end of the day be shared to benefit the kids you're serving, but there is this urge to just be like, "This is working for my kids; I'm going to keep it to myself."

Heidi: Yes! Oh my gosh.

Erica: It's inhibitive to collaboration, so I mean, there are all these dynamics that go into it. I would say charter schools are...a little microcosm of what it's like in the broader teaching community because they're so much more competitive, and there's so much more turnover, and there's also no tenure or unions. And without the tenure and unions, it makes the collaborative piece much harder because teachers feel like they're staking a claim on their job, rather than being a part of the school.

Erica saw that, especially in charters and other schools where teachers have one-year contracts that are renewable (or not) depending on students' scores, testing compels teachers into a dynamic of competition. Within a competition framework, and without time to get to know colleagues as people (and not merely competitors), distancing one's self from other teachers makes sense while collaboration does not. Despite the logic and practices that pit teachers against one another and encourage blaming other teachers, Erica was missing dialogue—"there was no sense of give-and-take or communication." She had an analysis that was critical of the ways competition disallowed collaboration, making teachers feel "frazzled" and not benefiting students.

While I expected a certain degree of other teacher talk from TFA teachers, since implicit in their model of infusing urban schools with “high-quality teachers” is the assumption that there are not good teachers in these schools, teachers from Project Voice also picked up this discourse. Jack believed that other teachers were deserving of certain punishments:

Jack: This is me getting on my soapbox, which I’ve been on a lot recently, in this past hour. They’re running... They’re trying to run the school system like a business because money is tight right now. You can’t run a school district like a business! I think I’ve said this before.

Heidi: Yeah!

Jack: Without being able to fire people that don’t work! I don’t know.

I thought Jack was going in a different direction with his critique that schools cannot be run using a business model; I hoped he would say we cannot put profits (or other measurable outcomes) over people, or that learning is different from selling goods. Instead, he supported the commonsensical idea that there are a large number of teachers who simply “don’t work,” and the problem is that, unlike in the business world, schools cannot fire teachers. In a sense, he believes that business-inspired practices have not gone *far enough* in schools, and perhaps schools could be run like businesses if tenure and union protections ended, at least for other teachers.

Jack was feeling particularly fed up with his job during this interview. He was frustrated with a state of “negativity” and was looking to “escape”:

Jack: I can’t do it. And it might just be the last four years, too. It very well could, but I don’t see much different going on in the district. I mean, there’s pockets of greatness, but the majority is negativity. Like, “You’re bad, the kids are bad, everybody’s bad.” You know, you have no choice;

just do it. And right now—right now we have people coming in, and this guy came in, had no clue who he was. At least he introduced himself to me. Suit, tie, “Hi, I’m...” this director, Dr. Blah, blah, blah. Director of something.

Heidi: He came into your classroom?

Jack: Yep. I was like, “Great man. Have a seat.” He was like, “Can I see your lesson plans?” I was like, “Man, truthfully, I forgot them at home. I was doing them last night.” He’s like, “Okay.” Sat down, sat there, wrote a bunch of stuff on a thing, and walked out.

Heidi: Who was he?

Jack: Some smooth-looking black guy. Not [names someone I did not know, but who apparently is also a “smooth-looking black guy”]. A smooth-looking black guy. He was from the Upstate School District; he was a director. And he just comes in. And I’m like, “Great man! Come on in.” I have nothing to hide; I’m not going to do anything different.

There is a lot going on in this part of the interview. Jack struggles to negotiate between the logics of accountability and surveillance for other teachers and for himself. He does not totally give up on the idea of being surveilled—he has “nothing to hide”—but he feels intruded upon. (“At least he introduced himself” refers to another instance when Jack said a person came to observe his classroom without introducing himself. I discuss this instance in the previous chapter.) There is pressure on teachers to give into this logic of accountability; teachers do not want to look like a failure, so they give into the surveillance, even while they recognize it is unfair. Jack seems to like the idea that *other* teachers who presumably do not work should be fired, and this is part of

the strong, commonsensical neoliberal discourse against teachers and other public workers, but he himself did not have his lesson plans done. Should he be fired? This contradiction reveals how it is easy to *say* “bad” teachers should be fired, but it is difficult to actually define and evaluate “good” or “bad” teaching, and it reveals teaching as complex.

Jack’s “smooth-looking black guy” comment also deserves attention. It may speak to the level of racial segregation in the city, or it at least reveals Jack as someone who does not have a lot of contact with black adults. For Jack to describe the observer as “smooth-looking” and to point out that he was wearing a suit and had the title of Dr. points to a social construction of blackness in which looking professional or smooth is *not* the norm. Jack feels imposed upon by the observer and recognizes that the nature of observation is not quite fair or accurate, but perhaps this surveillance is even harder for Jack to swallow because it is done by a “smooth-looking” black man. In other words, there are multiple factors that shape how Jack feels about being observed by outsiders—any by this particular outsider—and race is definitely one.

Teachers constructing themselves as “good” teachers. Talking about other “bad teachers” served as a way for my participants to construct themselves as good teachers; they distanced themselves and their teaching from these other teachers. Other teacher talk often also revealed what the participants thought teaching should and should not look like. While Erica recognized some of the practices that led to other teacher talk, she also engaged in it. In this next section, Erica critiques the teaching style of her partner teacher, the other fourth grade teacher at her charter school. She oscillates between blaming her and blaming the realities of the audit culture that she faces:

Erica: She was a cookbook, teach-it-to-the-test sort of woman, and I don’t blame her; she was a career teacher! She has two kids, she is on a year-to-year

contract—how do you put yourself out there in that situation? She’s a single mom! She had life circumstances that dictated that she needed to perform, her kids needed to perform. You put people in a position where their livelihood rests on the test scores of 20 kids? How do you expect them to take risks in the classroom?

Heidi: Right.

Erica: She and I were just at very different places in our life. She’s a good teacher! She’s a good person. But, you put people in that sort of position where it’s like, “I’m not going to have an income to feed my kids next year,” and sure she sat there and she taught, you know, the test prep books. It’s easy for me not to. I’m—I was 22 years old.

Heidi: Right.

Erica: I had an entire, like, other field to go into. I had a different education to fall back on. I could have gone into business or whatever.

Heidi: Right.

Erica: You know, I was able to do it. When it came down to it though, at the midterm, you know they do tests in fall, winter and spring—winter to gauge where your kids are at. By winter, my kids were more than half way to their end-of-the-year goals. And everybody, you know... I had the highest test scores in the school. I immediately had the principal’s support for what I was doing, and it was funny and sad that all of a sudden everyone was on her case for teaching to the test.

Heidi: Yeah.

Erica: And you know, on the one hand, I feel like what's best for kids is to teach them, and to teach them *real* curriculum and real information and content. But sometimes you get in a position where you have to choose what's best between, for your kids and what's best for you. And, that's a hard position...

Heidi: (talking at the same time) That's awful.

Erica: ...to be put in. Especially as a person whose *career* is to benefit kids, but you're choosing between other people's kids and your own. And how do you make that decision?

Erica is critical of her partner teacher's "cookbook" methods, but she is also understanding of why she teaches in this way. She recognizes the constraints put on her colleague and other "career" teachers, and she is critical of the lack of control they had to take risks and to teach "*real* curriculum." While Erica acknowledges these constraints, she does not seem to identify with her partner fully. She recognizes her struggles and that she had certain "life circumstances", but she still sees her as an "other" teacher who gave into the pressures to teach to the test. She is unable to disrupt the strong us/them competitive dynamic that allows Erica to be the good, successful, neoliberal subject and that constructs her partner as a failure. Similar to how Erica had drawn on deficit discourse to construct her student without breakfast and with a behavior "disorder" as unworthy to be tested, here she seems to construct this teacher as unworthy to meet the demands of market-based schooling. When other individual teachers are deemed unworthy or unable to meet performance requirements, any critique of the system that produces these requirements halts. Erica also justifies her own pedagogy by again relying on test scores, mentioning at one point that she had the highest scores in her school.

Nisha also situated herself as a good teacher by engaging in other teacher talk. I asked Nisha about the dynamic between TFA teachers and the non-TFA teachers at her school. She said some teachers and staff made their dislike of the TFA teachers “very clear,” and she said she understood their critique that TFA teachers leave after two years, but...:

But, the difference is that we were hired by the program. We were there because we *care*.

You could be a teacher who’s taught for 30 years, but if you don’t care about your kids and you don’t care about their progress, then you’re just as useless as those people that have left. The difference also is that the Teach For America corps members, once you have that experience, you are going to go on to do something related to education. It sucks that what they really need are just teachers to stay, and I get that perception and that’s understandable, but every single Teach For America corps member who I have been involved in in some way is doing something with education. And that was not their track. I was going to go to law school after Teach For America. I was going to do human rights law, blah, blah, blah. I’d done all these papers on women’s rights.

Nisha positioned herself and other TFAers as good because they “care” about students, while, apparently, veteran teachers do not necessarily care about students. TFAers are also good because they sacrificed their original plan or original career track to teach. It seems important to her to say teaching was not her plan; she is capable enough to have done something else like practice law—while maybe other teachers are not capable—but she cares so much that she chooses to stay.

Critiques of other teachers *outside* of a neoliberal framework. In engaging in other teacher talk, teachers both picked up neoliberal discourse and tried to resist neoliberal discourse. Teachers picked up the discourse by making other teachers the target of blame, but paradoxically they did so in response to the neoliberal constraints of productivity on themselves. de Certeau (1984) would perhaps call this response a “strategy”—a way of operating that goes along with power—because it is labor that is not ultimately helping teachers’ cause, and potentially hurting it. However, not all critiques of other teachers occurred within a neoliberal framework; teachers were also sometimes critical of other teachers for things that might not matter so much within the logics of accountability. Maddie, for instance, was very critical of teachers who treated students unfairly:

Maddie: I’m not backing down. If it bothers me and it’s about my kids, I’m going to eat you up and spit you out, and [the administration] know that. I do not ever... I don’t care how long you’ve been teaching, I don’t care what you do here. If you’re not doing what you’re supposed to, and you want to comment on me, we’re going to have problems.

Heidi: Yeah.

Maddie: I’ve had a couple this year. Normally I’m not like that. But I’ve got to handle a few people. That thing with being on the [teaching] team. [Mr.] Harris. I have a kid in my class, Ramon, who the first two months, he was a nightmare. I gave him strikes all the time. Then he was really trying. Harris always singles Ramon out. He’s like, “I can’t stand Ramon.” I’m like, “He can tell you can’t stand him.” I’m like, when blue is lining up, everyone is talking and you always yell at Ramon. So then Ramon got to

go on the field trip. Doesn't he come in my room, "Ramon, I'm so proud that you're going on the field trip." I just looked at him. I said, "That's funny." Of course, at lunch he's saying how much he didn't give a crap about Ramon, and he felt bad about it. The funny thing is Ramon didn't even pick up his head. He already knows. Don't be fake, Jeremy. I was so annoyed, and so was my student teacher because she loves Ramon.

Maddie disapproved of this teacher, not because he was lazy or unproductive or inefficient—the usual complaints market-based reformers have about teachers—but because of how he mistreated Ramon. Teachers had critiques of other teachers that in some ways can be seen as simply following along with the “teacher-is-to-blame” discourse, but Maddie’s talk illuminates that teachers also carved out space for different kinds of critiques. She continued to talk about problem teachers at her school:

That's the thing with teaching. Like right now, we have a bunch of fourth grade teachers who don't care and send their kids down to ISS all the time. They always have to go to classroom management meetings when they don't think they need any classroom management, but they don't teach. All they do is yell at the kids all day and send them out of their room, or face their desks that way.

Not all critiques of other teachers or teacher deficits are generated through a neoliberal, anti-public lens. Similarly, as I argue in Chapter Four, not all that urban students lack is understood through the deficit discourse. Urban students can lack access to healthy food, and we can have a critique of that reality without blaming the parents, for instance. Here, Maddie may sound like she is simply latching onto neoliberal discourse and harping on teachers who “don't teach,” but her critical talk seems to come from a different place. I want to remain vigilant against the strong

tendency to focus on urban teachers as the main problem of schools while still allowing space for teachers' legitimate concerns and critiques of other teachers to be heard.

Teachers did not use just one kind of other teacher talk. Although Nisha had started with an extreme example of a bad teacher, she also engaged in other teacher talk in expressing her displeasure with teachers who treated urban students and special education students disrespectfully:

And I think it was just the tone that a lot of teachers had. A lot of the negativity; there was not positive reinforcement, and a lot of these kids are so used to teachers telling them, especially special ed. course students, that they're stupid, that they're never going to be smart. I had heard myself, like teachers telling students, "Well, you're just getting in the way. Just sit in the back of the classroom." You know, stuff like that where it's just like really negative and cutting them down. They're kids, and at the end of the day, a lot of them are knuckleheads, a lot of them are middle school, and hormones are all over the place, but they're still kids. To talk down to them was just... That was really, really hard to take.

Again, rather than her critique coming from a neoliberal impulse, Nisha seems to be fighting against teachers who engaged in a kind of deficit thinking. In order to defend students' rights to be treated to be justly other teachers, Nisha draws on developmental discourses—students' status as "kids" should guarantee them a certain level of fair treatment, despite "hormones" and that some are "knuckleheads."

Disrupting other teacher talk: the presence of good teachers. A very different kind of other teacher talk did not serve to "other" them but to position other teachers positively. While other teacher talk usually was negative, at times participants shared their experiences with other

teachers they admired and teachers who supported them. Noticing when TFAers said that other teachers helped them is especially interesting because ostensibly, “bad teachers” are the problems of schools—they are why TFA teachers need to be there. Indeed, A former TFAer who quit after one of her two-year commitment wrote against what she saw as TFA’s “unspoken logic that current, non-TFA teachers and schools are failing at the task of closing the achievement gap, through some combination of apathy or incompetence” (Blanchard, 2013). Kelly was aware of this perception that many TFAers had, in relation to their abilities and the abilities of other teachers:

TFA does instill that a bit. Like, “You’re going to go save all these kids!” No... They also, I think, make you think that you’re better than all of these veteran teachers. Absolutely not! Just because you’re not TFA doesn’t mean you’re not a dynamic teacher, but that is a perception that they kind of... [had].

TFA teacher Anne, like Kelly, saw that there were capable, non-TFA teachers in her school, and she relied on them:

Um, I think any first year teacher—you’re just developing everything. You don’t have filing cabinets full of worksheets and activities that you’ve done for years and years. You’re just—everything you have to come up with new. I mean, I think I was really fortunate to have... I considered myself in the best situation. On my teaching team, I had one teacher who had been teaching—it was her second year teaching. My first year was her second year. And then I had two teachers who had been teaching for over twenty years on my team. So I could go to them for like the, “I don’t even know how to teach this” or “Do you have any materials I can use for a certain topic?”—I could go to those really experienced teachers.

Anne's experience with helpful, "really experienced" teachers goes against the construct of the lazy, old-school, veteran teacher who does not have what it takes to do right by kids. Despite TFA's model of placing young, motivated, but relatively inexperienced teachers in poor schools, one of TFA's own researchers revealed during a public Skype lecture that their recent studies also go against this construct. Their study found that TFA teachers with more experience in schools prior to teaching were better teachers, which, oddly, may leave TFA scrambling to add more student teaching experiences, similar to the schools of education they deride.

While experienced teachers ended up helping Anne, she did not feel comfortable asking them for help at first:

Um, but at the beginning of the year, you haven't built that relationship [with other teachers]; I didn't know how willing they would be to help me. Which, it turned out they were very willing to help me on whatever I needed, but I probably wasn't as comfortable going to them at the beginning and letting them know what problems I was having. Um, I don't know. I mean, the kids were very challenging. I lied to them and didn't tell them it was my first year teaching. I made it sound like the training we had in Houston—that I had actually been a teacher in Houston.

Part of Anne's challenges came from the fact that she did not want to appear as a novice to her students or to other teachers, and this interfered with how much she sought support. The idea that other teachers are incapable, along with the logics of competition and individualism, kept Anne from easily collaborating with other teachers, at least initially. Within this seemingly hostile, isolating environment, it made sense to Anne to see her students through a deficit lens—"the kids were very challenging"—rather than to see the anti-collaborative environment as the source of her challenges.

Most teachers seemed to pick up different kinds of negative other teacher talk, even if they also at times recognized other teachers who they respected. One teacher who never blamed other teachers, however, was Benjamin:

Heidi: So, you probably know that your story runs counter to a lot of what I hear from TFA people that are very, at least anti-union at the start, or you know, love data-driven things, test-driven things. How did you get to this place where you are now? Do you see it very different from where you started?

Ben: Um. I guess I attribute it to ... sorry I'm pausing. I haven't thought about that a ton.

Heidi: That's okay.

Ben: I attribute it partly to what I came into teaching *from*, which was a lot of anti-racist organizing work at the university level; so partly that. And, you know, that worked! You just get exposed to—if you're into it long enough and deep enough—you get exposed to a lot of the critique of standardized testing. For example, a lot of the broader, systemic critique of what's wrong with society, it's not just the fault of a bunch of teachers, but there's actually a whole bunch of factors going on like racism, poverty, segregation, etc. So partly that. Um, partly what I got involved in while I was first teaching.

Heidi: Okay.

Ben: The second year of teaching in L.A., I taught in Compton. I mean, I guess part of what I witnessed at the school that I was at, which was I relied

heavily, heavily, heavily on the teacher next door to me who was a veteran, no-nonsense, but completely loving African-American teacher, you know, quite late in her career, and I just totally relied on her. And I looked at her as, you know, my hero in teaching. And once you have that kind of relationship, it's a little bit hard to sort of fall into the veteran teacher bashing, union bashing. She was part of the union...

Benjamin talks about his background in anti-racism organizing and how that offered him a critical framework of structural inequalities. I will discuss this idea of alternative frameworks more in the next chapter. In addition to this framework, his personal relationship with a veteran teacher made it difficult to, as he says, “fall into” the prevalent neoliberal discourses that blame public school teachers, other kinds of public workers, and their unions for larger, structural problems.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates that the teachers were critical of many parts of their work in urban schools. Their critiques should be heard not as complaints but should serve to inform better working conditions. The data in this chapter suggest teachers need more time, and more control over their time, for instance. They felt the pressures that come with competition, surveillance, and the lack of opportunities to collaborate with other teachers, and many found a career in teaching to be unsustainable under such pressures. Examining the shape the urban teachers' critiques took also helps to better understand the interconnectedness of neoliberal and deficit discourse. While I argue that teachers' critical talk can be understood as a kind of agency or resistance against strong neoliberal measures, neoliberalism often remained a nebulous target

for that critical talk. The enduring deficit discourse, on the other hand, helped provide an easier target—urban students themselves.

CHAPTER SIX

Teacher-Student Relationships despite Deficit Discourse:

Activating Alternative Frameworks and Taking Urban Students Seriously

In this chapter, I examine moments when the urban teachers disrupted deficit discourse. Given the constraints on teachers' work, and the pervasiveness of deficit thinking, it is significant to pay attention to how teachers sometimes disengaged from deficit thinking and avoided blaming urban students and families. Regrettably, teachers at times simply blamed other teachers (as I discussed in Chapter Five), but here I explore more productive challenges to deficit discourse. Understanding that deficit thinking is a discourse that *circulates* within schools, teachers did not fall into strict categories of “resistor” of deficit discourse or “maintainer” of deficit discourse. While some teachers may have been able to challenge deficit thinking more often than others, they negotiated with deficit beliefs and practices in an ongoing manner. Here, I consider how teachers' relationships with students offered them glimpses of *knowing* students—a kind of “knowing” that was not rooted in deficit thinking.

Teacher-student relationships do not exist in a vacuum. The “new sociology of childhood” understands child-adult relationships as existing within discourse and within unequal power relations (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; Lee, 2001; Matthews, 2007; Wyness, Harrison, & Buchanan, 2004). These are not only inter-personal relationships, but relationships that must contend with wider social constructions and social meanings of adult versus child, and social forces that lend authority unevenly to adults and exclude children from participation in social life. Although children traditionally are seen as passive, the new sociology of childhood positions children as social actors in their relationships with adults and the world. Youth can be said to occupy a position that is “differently equal” (Bjerke, 2011; Moosa-Mitha, 2005) with

adults, a position that allows for both dependence and agency. Young people “ask to be respected as persons who, although in some ways are different from adults, still have equal value as members of the school as a community” (Bjerke, 2011, p. 101).

To have the kind of relationship with students that could disrupt not only deficit thinking but that also might disturb the traditional adult-child hierarchy, teachers seemed to need *access to frameworks* or models that opposed deficit discourse, and they needed some way of *taking students seriously*. Teachers showed they took students seriously in a variety of ways, including identifying with students or placing students on the same plane as them; seeing students’ behavior and concerns as legitimate; sharing themselves with students; making an effort to get to know students, and having high academic expectations of students.

Access to Alternative Frameworks

When teachers contested deficit thinking, I often detected them using other frameworks or lenses to understand their students and their work. Sometimes teachers referred to these alternative frameworks directly. Nisha, for instance, talked about drawing on her knowledge of inclusive education. Ben discussed his involvement in social justice work with parents, students and other teachers. Pritika said her school worked *against* using a “savior” model. Perhaps predictably, teachers who had a lens that could compete with a deficit lens offered other kinds of understandings of urban youth. In the following interview excerpt, Nisha’s perspectives are shaped by the inclusion model:

Nisha: Um, so my thoughts on inclusion. (small laugh) When I taught with an inclusion model... And if I was *just* a gen. ed. teacher, and I did not have experience working with special ed. students—like, having the credential to work with special ed. students—I would be so frustrated *because* that is

extra time that you have to dedicate outside of what you're *already* dedicating to really tailor your curriculum and differentiate how you're teaching, so that a sixth-grader who's reading at a second-grade level can access the same information as a sixth-grader who's reading at a fourth-grade level! You know? And so, you have to know how to work with those kids. It's incredibly challenging. But, from having worked at OSSE, and my mission as a representative was to promote, you know, people to push kids *back* into an inclusion-type of environment—if it made sense, obviously; not doing it if it doesn't make sense for the kid. But it was because it is, to me, a form of segregation for a special ed. student to be removed from the general education population and being taught in an environment, if that is not *their* least restrictive environment. And I would say this all the time to staff at schools; I was just like, "There's no special ed. McDonald's and special ed. Denny's or special ed. movie theaters."

Heidi: That's a good analogy.

Nisha: "The entire world is around general ed." You know? That, "You should be able to read, you should be able to do this... You're not segregating people in that environment, so why are you segregating them in the classroom?" You know?

Here, Nisha's experience with and background knowledge on inclusion helps her to have a perspective on students that other teachers might not have. Not only does she not fall into a kind of deficit thinking that blames urban special education students as being different, deficient, "extra" work—"these kids." She is also sympathetic to teachers who are overworked, who have

the constraints of little time, and who have little support and little knowledge of how to accomplish inclusion. While she is understanding of how much work teachers already have, she does not let teachers off the hook, nor does she abandon the principles of inclusion. Instead, she advocated for all students to be included and to change staff mindsets on inclusion.

Ben also talked directly about his social justice and anti-racist perspectives, and it was clear how they shaped his view of urban schooling and urban students and families. He had an activist background, and he continued to participate actively in multiple social justice groups, including a caucus within the union, parent and student groups, and a school-university partnership with the University of Southern California. Ben also opposed neoliberal reforms and the effects they had in his district:

So, one of the reasons that the superintendent, who is Ron Beckett, who comes out of the Gates Foundation and is part of the market-oriented reform approach, that sort of swept the nation... One of the reasons he came after Bennett [School] is because he felt like our reform model was out of his control, that it was being run by teachers and academics who would stand up to him around educational research, his moral authority and political authority, and he didn't like the organizing that was happening in groups, and so he was definitely looking for an opportunity to try and disrupt the model that we were building, so he did that this year by announcing this "magnet conversion." We immediately called it reconstitution because he basically said that he was looking to get rid of trouble-maker teachers and that sort of thing.

Through the political work that he did, Ben had developed strong, articulate frameworks of resistance. He had an analysis of "market-oriented reform." He was able to see the challenges he

and other teachers faced stemming not from “these kids” types of explanations, but from, in part, things like charter school expansion:

It’s gotten more challenging in the last few years as the student population has declined significantly. Um, mostly because of the encouragement of charter schools, and mostly the big-box corporate charters set up right around Bennett, very intentionally to try and drain out enrollment. And that’s worked, and it’s primarily drained out the higher-performing students with more active parents.

In contrast to the students *themselves* being constructed as “challenging,” Ben recognized other forces working against urban public schooling and creating challenges for teachers and students.

Andre also challenged deficit discourse. He referenced culturally relevant approaches and was able to talk about whiteness as hegemonic. He had frameworks that allowed to him to know his students in ways that maybe other adults at his school did not know them, and this knowledge came out as he discussed the rewards students got in return for complying with the strict discipline system:

Andre: They do a lot of fun things that some of the other schools can’t do. That’s how they justify it. They’re like, “Well, your friends at *these* schools aren’t having a trip to DC. You guys are not able to throw eggs at your...” Well, no—water balloons. There was an egg toss, but there was a water balloon thing. One of the incentives was to throw water balloons at the assistant principal if you reached some goal. One of the teachers shaved their heads as a bet with the kids if they reached a certain point. So there’s this other element of fun that other schools didn’t have, that I think was

kind of cool but a bit forced, and I don't know if it was really culturally relevant, given...

Heidi: It's like adult fun, or something?

Andre: Right. I think the adults were having a lot... I can't say *more* fun, but it was just... The vibe that I got, given where I come from and who I am, I was like, "This is the kind of fun that these kids see on TV." Like, as in white kid fun.

Heidi: Yeah! Right.

Andre: You know? I think, if you're trying to demand respect from your students by making them sit up-right, throwing a water balloon at an authority figure kind of unravels the same respect that they're trying to build, you know?

As a young black man from a family engaged in social justice and racial justice work, Andre could draw upon this knowledge to interpret school life in ways that other teachers may have missed. Having been educated in the city where he taught, Andre also had had a lens that allowed him to name racial and economic segregation between the schools. He had attended a nationally-ranked public high school, but he noted, "There are no white kids in public school in the city, except for my own high school. None, and everyone knows that." Understanding how his KIPP School existed within this context, and existed for the purpose of addressing this segregated context, to an extent, Andre was perceptive to how deficit thinking and other raced dynamics played out within the school.

Sometimes teachers might not have directly named an alternative framework, but they still had an approach that allowed them to counter deficit thinking. Christine, for instance,

discussed the importance of connecting content to students' interests and building on their existing knowledge base:

I gave them reading passages with multiple choice questions just to have another idea of where they are comprehension-wise, grade-level comprehension-wise, like grade-level reading. One of them was related to something that we read. They've heard this topic before. They do a lot better when they've had experience. That's true of anybody. If you have experience with something, whether you've read that passage or not, you have a context to place it in so your comprehension is stronger. I feel like that's what we're losing when we're told, "Follow this program." Like the old joke about *Snowflake Bentley* is in the reading program, but it's not in the winter; it's in June. Why would you read a story about snowflakes...? Do you know what I mean?

In this moment, Christine could have constructed—as other teachers had done in other moments—her urban students as inherently inept. She could have understood the school's reading program as legitimate and saw her students as lacking, as not measuring up. Instead, she recognizes her students as simply needing context and past experience with which to connect content—which is "true of anybody"—and she is critical of a curriculum that has students reading a winter-themed book at the end of the school year in the summer. Christine, however, also seems aware that some educators think starting with urban students' experiences is a bad idea:

Christine: When I go back to kids at risk, you've got to connect it. It's got to be...
This is my personal feeling in terms of building their skills—before you can build their skills, they've got to want to. To make them want to you've got to connect it in some way to something tangible that they can relate to.

Now if you're feeling like... An argument against it is you're not going to use their home experience if they have a bad home life. You can't use that experience to build on, but you can also say, "Well that's true," but you still have to find something that they will buy into. I think when we're told, "Use programs, do it this way..." I've had teachers who have said to me—not in this school—you have to be on a certain day of the program doing the same lesson as everybody else, or you're doing it wrong. That's stupid. I think that connecting things... Again, I don't remember what the other story... Oh, we talked about solar system, night and day, and seasons. Then something they were reading had to do with that, had to do with the sun. It wasn't the same information, even, but they did much better because they'd already had experience. We've got to build that experience piece.

Heidi: Why is the assumption...? You just said the thing about drawing on your family experience. Who assumes that it's going to be a bad family experience?

Christine: Well, I guess I would say... I'm not saying family, maybe. I should say out-of-school experience. I think we don't give enough credit to... Well, when we did the...with you at Garber, when I did the "bring a picture in." Remember that?

Heidi: Yeah, the history project.

Christine: Remember how much that made a difference? Kids really were invested in writing something about their picture. That's even on a very simple level.

We've got to start with them more. Oh, what I was saying is I think you can teach reading and you can teach writing anything through a more experiential model. It's going to be more work than picking up a book and saying, "Okay, open to page six." I guess that's about demanding we do more. Cover more ground, but isn't it better maybe to cover less ground, but then to give them problem solving skills? I guess that's more about consistency and worrying people aren't doing it in a way that's consistent, and I understand that.

In this excerpt, the deficit discourse lurks, even as Christine challenges it. Toward the beginning, she uses "at-risk" language and almost seems to assume that urban students are not innately motivated to learn—"before you can build their skills, they've got to want to"—but she puts the onus on what *she and other teachers must do* to make the curriculum meaningful for students. When I pushed Christine on the "bad home life" assumption, she was able to draw on a past example of a history project that disrupted this assumption. She had asked students to bring in a photograph from home and to write their personal histories into a larger History, a project in which students and their histories and families were valued. Christine does not come out and say she is drawing on culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), but she does mention an experiential model that honors students' experiences and does not assume these experiences are only "bad": "We've got to start with them more."

School-Wide Alternative Frameworks

Individual teachers brought alternative frameworks into the classroom with them, but schools that worked to offer a cohesive, anti-deficit frame of some sort provided perhaps more support for teachers to be able to challenge deficit perspectives of their students. In other words,

the school culture mattered for how teachers maintained deficit thinking or not, and the leadership of the school was important in fostering and making available different kinds of frameworks.

I saw many instances when the “school culture” that teachers and administrators talked about was really about discipline and control. School culture equaled rules. When teachers said their schools were lacking school culture, teachers often meant that they thought there was a lack of order. Pritika, however, had access to a framework that was opposed to, precisely, deficit approaches that focused too much on discipline and control. She discussed how many teachers and leaders at her school consciously resisted an emphasis on student behavior *and* resisted trying to “save” students. While Pritika appreciated this alternative framework, she also believed it caused some unintended problems:

Pritika: Our discipline, there was no school-wide discipline code that was strictly enforced, and that was understood by students. Because [the principal] was aware of the fact that that was a challenge at other schools. Students weren’t alienated for misbehaving, for instance. That was actually a good thing, I thought, but we didn’t have another discipline code that they understood, and that was conducive to their development. We had a student that, for instance, flipped out at a teacher and hit a teacher, hit the principal, and then was back in class the next day. No repercussions.

Heidi: Nothing?

Pritika: Nothing. There wasn’t even a culture of accountability. That’s a problem. That’s a huge problem. In our school, we were openly critical of KIPP-kind of discipline codes where students were treated like criminals.

Heidi: Like, “I’m breaking all the rules right now.” (I slouched in my chair.)

Pritika: Well, yeah, “I’m breaking every rule.” There’s a rule for everything, like, if you blink twice instead of once, there’s a discipline for that, or consequence for that. Or if you come out of line, or if you whisper when you’re in line in the hallway, there’s a consequence for that. We didn’t have that.

Heidi: So that was openly talked about? Something that you didn’t want to replicate?

Pritika: Yeah, that we didn’t want... We had a very diverse...and by diverse I mean a large majority of our faculty were African-American, and who grew up in that community, actually—in that same neighborhood in Southeast. They didn’t like that type of strict discipline code because there was a dynamic set-up there when you have, say, non-black teachers or non-Hispanic teachers saying certain things or disciplining for certain things so frequently, and your majority of your students are African-American. They face that every day. They were very openly critical of that. We were very openly aware of that. At the same time, we were also critical about the fact that there was no accountability for behavior.

Heidi: I see.

Pritika: I meant system. System for accountability, I’m sorry. That also wasn’t allowed, and I think because there was a guilt... There was, I think, a guilt that our principal carried with him, and that some of our administration carried with them. Either for being white, or for being privileged, that they

were afraid, or hesitant to build an accountability system. That was something that brought in a lot of divide in our faculty, as well.

Heidi: Almost like there weren't high enough expectations because you didn't want to...?

Pritika: You didn't want to be the "overly savior" person.

At Pritika's school, there was discussion among the staff and somewhat of a shared understanding that overuse of discipline was not something they wanted to do; they did not want to treat their students of color "like criminals." Pritika also had access to an understanding of race and other kinds of privilege/oppression. While Pritika worried that in the staff's conscious effort to not over-discipline students, that *no* system of accountability existed, she liked that students were not "alienated for misbehaving." She and others at the school had an understanding of concepts like the savior figure, as well as knowledge of the strict, "KIPP-kind of discipline codes" that other schools used, and this understanding directly informed how they would *not* treat their students.

As the staff at Pritika's school noticed, KIPP was a school that had a very strong culture of discipline—one they were for the most part critical of and tried not to reproduce in their own school. Andre who taught for KIPP, while critical of his charter school's focus on behavior and order, also pointed out some parts of the school's approach that were not about behavior. He described how the language that was used at his school attempted to create a different framework for seeing students:

Heidi: When you said, the "structure"... I've heard other teachers talk about the structure, or the culture, of the school. And a teacher in Upstate City that I just interviewed kept saying that, but what I think he really meant was

discipline. Is that what you mean, too, or was there something else that tied everyone together?

Andre: Yeah, I think so. There was this whole theme of... I can't remember the term we used, but there was an ethical portion to the curriculum. Every week we had this word that we had to drill into the kids' heads. I think one was "integrity," another... (OC: I laugh. He seems like he is ridiculing these terms; he doesn't take them seriously.) You know, these "values"...

Heidi: Value education, or character education?

Andre: Right. No, I think it was something about character or value, something like that. So, throughout the lesson they were like, "Weave these things into your math lesson and the language that you use when you talk." Oh, and the other part of the culture was the language that you use. So, we don't call them students; we call them scholars. We don't call them classes, we call them teams. Each class, the other level of class, like your age-group class... You're not a sophomore, you're not an eighth-grader, you're not a fifth-grader; you're the Class of 2014 because you will graduate from high school and go to college in that year.

Heidi: You'll graduate college 14...

Andre: Right. Your homeroom was named after the undergrad institution of your homeroom teacher, so I was Morehouse Spellman.

Heidi: Okay, that's nice.

Andre: So, those are some other cultural elements. If someone is trying to think, like they raise their hand, they thought they had the answer, then they kind

of freeze? Instead of everyone just sitting quietly, they're like, "Alright, send out some positive energy to that student," so everyone does this... It's cute, but...you know? (He wiggles his fingers to mimic how they send good vibes to a student.)

Heidi: That's funny.

Andre: Yeah, those are some of the cultural elements. When I started teaching at the other school, and I was calling everyone scholars and teammates and all of that, everyone was like, "What the hell are you talking about?" Or "strong hands." That means raise your hand like this... (arm straight and high). You just throw it into your language. After maybe two weeks of teaching, you're speaking their language.

Heidi: Okay, wow.

Andre: Just like Teach For America has its own language, and probably any organization has its own language. I think KIPP has the most distinctive, recognizable, foreign language. You know when you walk into a classroom, these teachers are not speaking in the same ways that you're used to. I think that... You know, it has some power, and it's helpful.

Heidi: I like that, when...

Andre: The students didn't hate that.

Heidi: They didn't hate that as much... I like when there's an effort, or a concept to change the discourse or language. So, those all seem... The language seems to mirror a high expectation for the students.

Andre: For sure.

He noted that the “students didn’t hate” the language of “scholars,” and perhaps this is why he did not hate it as much, either. But there was still a disconnect between the high expectations and the focus on college that the school set forth through its *language*, and the enduring emphasis on discipline and control. In other words, the school tried to construct its students as college-going, capable people in some ways, even while the deficit framework continued to provide legitimacy for strict measures of control.

Taking Urban Students Seriously

Having models or frameworks other than a deficit model, perhaps unsurprisingly allowed the urban teachers to take students seriously and to have better relationships with their students. But even when teachers might not have had access to an alternative framework, teachers sometimes cracked deficit discourse and showed that they took students seriously. They did so in a variety of ways, including identifying with students or placing students on the same plane as them; understanding (rather than dismissing) their behavior and “complaints” as legitimate; allowing students to get to know them as people; making an effort to get to know students; and having high academic expectations of students. While I examine each of these different ways to take students seriously separately from one another, it is worth noting that teachers who connected with students used multiple strategies. In fact, it was sometimes difficult to distinguish whether a teacher was putting herself on the same plane with students, or was sharing personal information about her life with students, for example. It also makes sense that a teacher who works to get to know his students might also understand their behavior and take their critiques seriously. In other words, while there is some overlap in the different ways teachers were able to take their students more seriously, I want to examine these as distinct strategies to better understand them, and so that other teachers might use these strategies, as well.

Positioning Themselves on the Same Plane with Students

Teachers sometimes identified with students and tried to understand students' experiences by imagining themselves in similar situations. Teachers' "personal school talk" also put teachers on the same plane with students, in a sense, but as I discussed previously, it usually functioned to show the *differences* between the ostensibly flawed urban education system and their own "normal" K-12 experiences. However, I used the "same plane" code to mark instances when teachers aligned themselves *with* students. Putting students on the same level as themselves was one way teachers were able to take their students seriously. Andre, for example, understood how his students might have disagreed with the visual, strict discipline system because he knew that as a kid himself, he "would *not* have gone for that, at all." Kelly, too, in her critique of the "star" pose identifies with students and puts them on the same plane with adults—adults who would not be asked to do this kind of posture in adult meetings:

Kelly: I would sit there, and I would just be like who... I would sit in staff meetings and I'd look around like, "No one's sitting like this."

Heidi: Yeah, everyone probably has their cell phone out.

Kelly: Right, I'm doodling. No one...

Heidi: I love doodling! That's how I listen to pay attention, doodling.

Kelly: Oh, god. Actually, they told me at the last school that I needed to stop because it looked like I wasn't interested. I'm like, "Sorry! I'll stop doodling then."

Heidi: Wow, so what... "I'm listening!"

Kelly: "I am listening, it helps me focus." For some children, it helps them focus.

Kelly wonders why the star pose is so important if they are not asking the same of adults.

Further, she juxtaposes this star requirement with the expectation that the school had for all students to go to top colleges:

Kelly: I had kids say, “I’m going to go to Harvard.” “That’s great; you need to actually do your work, though.” These were kids that weren’t doing their work, and it’s like, “Do you understand what it means to get into Harvard?” I don’t think that the focus was where it needed to be for these kids to really push themselves. The academics were not in the forefront, so if they’re not internally motivated to do it, they’re not going to do it when they’re in college.

Although deficit assumptions about low motivation may be present here, rather than blame students outright, Kelly notes that the school’s requirements around behavior clash with a focus on high academic rigor.

While Pritika mostly talked to me about her experiences teaching middle school students, she said that she also liked teaching high school students. She initially thought she would only like high school students because she identified more with them: “I love high school. I get along great with adolescents. I think because I’m very reflective on the awareness that I built during my high school years, it allowed me to really connect with my high school students.” She uses a developmental lens to categorize what middle schoolers are like versus what high schoolers are like, but she also is able to identify with high school students because she remembers herself as someone who built “awareness” during that time in her life. Through putting her students on the same level as herself—at least her younger, high school self—she is able to see them as similarly

capable people who might also have “awareness” or the capacity for building awareness, and she escapes seeing students through a deficit lens.

Understanding vs. Dismissing Student Concerns

In an earlier chapter, I argued that teachers’ critiques are commonly read as mere “complaining” rather than valid concerns. Similarly, urban students’ concerns—their ideas, their observations, their likes and dislikes, their protests—are often written off. While we hear a lot *about* students, “student voice” literature suggests that adults rarely consult with students *themselves* (Cook-Sather, 2007; Fielding, 2004; Mitra, 2007; Rudduck & Flutter, 2004), perhaps especially rarely with urban and other marginalized students (Bragg, 2001; Mitra, 2001; Smyth, 2006), and scholars of student voice seek to remedy the omission of student voices. Educators are trained through discourse to hear the concerns of poor students and students of color as merely further proof of their defectiveness and disinterest in school, when they hear them at all (Alonso et al., 2009). However, some teachers I interviewed destabilized and disproved deficit assumptions when they were able to *understand* students’ concerns. Andre, for instance, had been discussing how testing worked in his southeast state, and he mentioned that his school’s curriculum was very test-centric. I asked him how students handled that kind of testing culture:

Heidi: Did students like that, in your view? Were they engaged?

Andre: It was hard to decide whether it was that *structure* that they disliked, or the fact that they were in school two extra hours and the discipline standards were higher than all of their cousins and friends and everyone else they knew that went to schools anywhere else. Collectively, the students hated the school. The number one quote was, “I hate this school. I can’t wait until I go to...blah, blah, blah school down the street.”

Here, Andre takes the students' critique seriously! A deficit perspective does not allow students to have a legitimate critique, and one way to fight deficit thinking is to hear students' complaints and critiques as valid—not just “these kids” complaining. Other teachers may not read students' desire to leave school as valid or understandable—they could read it *only* as these kids hating school. Andre shows that his students do not give up on education in general but that they particularly do not like *this* school. They want to move on to another school, and they have knowledge of what school is like for other youth that they know. Part of what allowed Andre to hear students in this way is that he understood his students as individuals. He seemed to know about the varying attitudes and ideas that existed within his class. While he said that collectively students hated the school, he went further and demonstrated that he had considered the *different ways* in which individual students critiqued their high-discipline, extended-day school:

Some of the kids were like, “I’m not behind,” and a lot of them were. Then you had the kids who were not behind, and ahead who were like, “Oh, okay. I get it. Whatever, I’ll do what you say.” Then you had the kids who just wanted to be good. They were like, “Okay, I’ll do it. I’ll do it because I just don’t want to get in trouble. I just want to be a good kid and not get yelled at by my parents.”

Despite Andre not having a lot control over the mode of efficiency operating in his school, he managed to consider students' different perspectives and understand students' different motivations as they also complied with this mode. Teachers who attend to individual students and talk and listen to them one-on-one are seen by students as caring and understanding (Alder, 2002).

Kelly, at times, also revealed how she understood her students' perspectives through a lens other than a deficit lens. She understood her students as knowledgeable about how the ways

teachers label students, for example. She said that “they definitely see when teachers play favorites and give special consideration to others. They absolutely see all of that.” She also showed that she understood students’ reasons for acting out, even though she did not like when students misbehaved:

Right, it’s like this self-fulfilling prophesy. They’re bad and they get two checks, and one check. Then they believe their behavior is horrible and they can’t do any better, so that’s it. It’s easier to do that. And they get more attention, to be honest. At NYC Uncommon, when a child acted up, they got more attention. So, I really believe that some of the students, the one who had to go sit in a nook and read... I think it’s because he would sit in class, and he was doing what the teachers asked, but then he would see the other kids acting out, and they were the ones getting the teachers’ attention. It didn’t matter if it was positive or negative. They were still getting attention, so they thought, “Okay, well I would like some attention. I’m going to act out.” Then you have this culture of, “The only way I’m going to get attention from a teacher or get someone to notice me, is for me to act out.”

Kelly might see her students as lacking in that she sees them as *in need of* attention, but she also legitimates students’ behavior. She *understands* the misbehavior, in a sense—as kids wanting to get attention, as rebelling against a system that did not let them redeem themselves after a certain number of “checks.”

Teachers Allowing Students to Get to Know Them

There are many studies that examine the importance for teachers to know their students. While I discuss how some teachers did that in the next section, here I explore how teachers also allowed their students to know them. I asked Christine directly about relationships, and she said

her young students seemed to like imagining her outside of school: “You eat food. You sleep in a bed.” She said that by telling her students stories about her life, she was able to build relationships and also often make connections to the books they were reading, or to other content:

Heidi: Do you feel like you have relationships...?

Christine: Telling them stories.

Heidi: Oh, see!

Christine: I’ll exaggerate. I’m not above exaggerating to get their attention. I’ll tell them just little stories. I think if you can make yourself human to them, I think it helps. I’m hoping that’s the beauty of this year. What I learned was I forgot how young third graders can be. From end of fourth graders to beginning of the year third graders, how young they can be. I’m really hoping to see what happens by the end of next year. I’m hoping... it’s not always easy for me to see incremental progress because when you’re in the thick of it, it’s hard to see but I’m curious to see what will happen. How much they’ll change over the next year and a half.

Heidi: What kind of stories have you told?

Christine: Wish I could remember. Well, I’ve had deer in my backyard, eating out of my bird feeders, and I was telling them about that.... I was telling them a story about when I lived in Wyoming and it was 50 below zero and my eyelashes were freezing. I’m trying to remember why I even told them that. Oh, we were talking about winter. We do winter poems. I’m trying to do things that I let go of because it’s not in the book. The week before

Christmas we made a winter poem. I've done this for years and years, but I didn't do it last year.

Christine draws upon developmental discourse in interpreting how students grow and change from third to fourth grade, but she also notices how sharing stories about her personal life makes her more “human” to her students. In realizing that students are interested in her stories, Christine is able to take them seriously as curious, interested people—even if they are young—and she is able to give their classwork some context and connection to the larger world.

Christine said that she kept books of the winter poems that previous classes had done in years past and that students really enjoyed reading their siblings' or friends' old poems. Despite the relevance of her own winter stories to the poem assignment and the excitement her stories seemed to build for students, I thought it was interesting that Christine felt like she had to apologize for “telling them stories.” She seemed like she felt she had to make an excuse for taking the time to tell students stories about her life, or perhaps she saw the stories as *only* a hook for the poem assignment:

You can turn any experience into a poem if you wanted to. I must have been telling them winter stories. That really has nothing to do with it, but I think I was just talking about winter. I don't know, but they were funny. You can get their attention with things like that.

Maddie was another teacher who shared a lot of herself with her students. She talked about doing this in multiple interviews, and we observed her doing this multiple times throughout the course of Project Voice. Her students knew she was in the Air Force. She told her students about her graduate courses and the homework that she did in the evenings. She told them stories about her family and friends. Maddie's students told us they liked her because she

was “real” with them. As I did with most of the teachers I interviewed, I asked Maddie how her friends and family perceived what her job was, as a way to guide teachers to talk about constructions of The Urban. While many teachers indicated that their friends and family had negative assumptions about urban communities (which they alternatively shared and/or countered), or were at least outsiders to urban communities, Maddie said this was not the case with her friends and family because she included them directly in her work with her students:

Heidi: What do your friends or family...what do they think that you do? I’m always interested because I have so many friends that say they work at urban schools, and everyone’s like, “Ohhh. Must be really bad,” or “Must be really hard,” or something.

Maddie: No. I don’t get any of that because they know I love my job. They see the kids. I bring them, when there’s an event or something, my sisters have always chaperoned, and if my sisters can’t do it, my friends come and chaperone. They’re like, “Oh my gosh, I love it; it’s so funny seeing you here; your kids are so cute; oh, I love that one.” Because when you come here... Again, instantly, they click with the kids. Like my sister, Anita, loves Imani. Yes. Loved her. I was like “Of all people.” When we walked in, there was Imani pushing the stroller, talking away to Anita. But instantly, those kids make connections. My family, they know I love this, and they love my kids. When they come in here and do something, they don’t want to leave. When I take my friends on field trips, it’s like, “Oh my gosh. If you need me again, call me.” Because the kids really... they love meeting new people.

Even while Maddie herself at other points had activated deficit discourse to understand her students, here she seems to take pride in her students and her work, so much so that she wants her friends and family to become involved in field trips and other parts of classroom life. Including friends and family is fun for them, but further, Maddie notices that her students “love meeting new people.” Introducing her students to some of the important people in her life seems to allow her a fresh take on her students. These interactions with new people allow Maddie to see Imani, for instance, in a new light as someone helping with a baby stroller.

Jonathon was another teacher who shared a great deal with his students, and he consciously strove to have strong relationships with them. While I am sure he shared stories from his own life with students, he also shared himself emotionally with his students:

Actually posted right above my desk, as we speak, are two letters written to me from my students, who were sitting actually in my classroom at the time, the day that I announced very begrudgingly that I was not going to be returning the following school year, and that I was moving out of Houston and out of the state. There was this very emotional moment. It kind of slipped out. I wasn't planning on telling them at the moment. I was definitely crying. My students were all sad, and several of them were crying. They wrote these letters to me, you know, congratulating me, but more importantly encouraging me. I have them over my desk because it speaks to that relationship. It reminds me why I did what I did. It reminds me why I got into teaching and how much I love it, and do miss it. It is a reminder of that, but it also speaks to the influence I had on my students, yet they also had on me. It's a constant reminder of how important education is, and you know, those students being very grateful for just the little things I did for them.

I asked Jonathon directly about his relationships with students. Since we did the interview using Skype, he was able to glance up above his desk at the letters from students that he had kept. He discussed how he had allowed himself to be vulnerable with his students at this moment, when he was going to be leaving teaching, but he also talked about another time he had let himself cry in front of students when they had watched and discussed a film about bullying. For Jonathon, these vulnerable moments were central to his work because they were the times he could connect with students; these moments were “why [he] got into teaching.”

Making the Effort to Get to Know their Students

Knowing one’s students is important for many reasons and is necessary for all kinds of educational goals—both academic and social. A Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach, for instance, necessitates that teachers know their students because it asks teachers to make instructional choices based on the learning styles of the students in the class (Thousand, Villa, Nevin, 2007). While it is considered good practice for all teachers to get to know their students, scholars argue it is particularly important for teachers of racially diverse students to know students and their backgrounds (Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995), especially as the students in U.S. public schools grow more diverse and the teaching force continues to be predominantly white women (Sleeter, 2001). Urban teachers must get to know the *actual* “individual backgrounds and identities” of their students, rather than assumptions and stereotypes about urban “culture” (Watson, Charner-Laird, Kirkpatrick, Szczesiul, & Gordon, 2006).

Some teachers had to work harder than others to know their students. While Jonathon said he had to do some work to feel connected with his students’ community, Maddie was already part of her students’ community in some ways. She saw some of her students at church,

for instance, and she ran into them over the summer at a neighborhood swimming pool.

Maddie's ability to get to know her students had a lot to do with who she was, where she lived and her identity as a woman of color, but she also had to put effort into learning about her students. When her students watched their first class-produced film together on the big screen, in front of two other Garber classes, she seemed to really know which students were embarrassed to see themselves on screen and why. In focus groups with the Project Voice teachers, Maddie also demonstrated that she knew her students as individuals. She enjoyed particular students' sense of humor. She made an effort to "check in" with each child every day, especially a shy student, even if only to exchange a couple of words. She knew one student was unhappy with the way she looked because she had written about it in an essay. Maddie also enjoyed coaching in the after-school "Building Men" program at Garber School, because she got to know younger boys who could have become her students in the future—and they got to know her: "And I love being part of Building Men because now I know their names and like they see me and they're like, 'Good Morning, Miss Johnson.' Not like, 'Yo, Miss.' Gone past that. They call me by my name."

Jonathon made a conscious effort to build relationships with students and their families, and he noted several times that his favorite part of teaching was getting to know his students. Jonathon said he would not have known his students and their community had he not been their teacher. For one, he moved to Houston only to become a TFA teacher, but he also felt that, despite being a man of color, he was very separate from his students and their community. He felt teaching was a worthwhile experience *because* of the students he met, who he said he would not have met otherwise. Teaching was a privilege *because* of the relationships he was able to make:

Just having that connection is definitely a good thing. It's a good feeling to feel like you've established and had that rapport with someone. If you weren't their teacher, you know, I never would have known the students or that community. It's definitely something I'll be able to take with me wherever I go.

In order to get to know his students, Jonathon made time and space for conversations with them. He remembered one particular time when a group of sixth graders wanted to talk to him, in the last few months before he left the school: "I got some peaches and we sat down, and we just talked about life." However, relationships with students did not always come easy for Jonathon: "The first year you don't really... You're trying so much to be an effective teacher that you don't really form relationships, at least I did not form very good relationships with my students." Although he said that it was difficult to establish those relationships at first, and although relationships might not have seemed like an important part of being an "effective teacher" initially, Jonathon soon found that knowing his students was central to his teaching:

After the second, third and fourth years, really getting to know my students well and to relate to them and have them come to me with their concerns about education or things going on at home, and just having that connection formed. One of the best things I loved about my job was just having former students visit and tell me, them asking me for help with their math homework, or just talking about different things they were doing in school and out of school. Even having students from my first and second year come back, and just relating—not even to come say thank you for what you did or anything like that—but just showing that they still cared and there is still a connection.

They felt like I was still invested, which I was and am, in their paths that they're taking and what the future has in store for them, and being able to give them advice, and just

talk to them and hear them, and really getting to see what is going on in some of their lives, in a very unfortunate way, but being able to be there to support them and encourage them, regardless.

Here, Jonathon talked passionately about learning about his students' lives. Other studies suggest that students appreciate a *reciprocal* relationship with teachers where there is shared respect: "Students value talking with teachers and being heard by them" (Alder, 2002, p. 263). Jonathon also greatly valued this back-and-forth relationship—the ability to "just talk to them and hear them." Noblit, Rogers and McCadden (1995) argue that part of being a caring teacher is this both/and ability to share with students and also hear from students:

Talk cannot be overemphasized, since it was through talk that children revealed their lives and teachers supported and nurtured them. Talk was reciprocal, requiring each to listen and hear as well as to speak. Talk became the currency of caring; each opportunity to talk came to have a history and a future. (p. 684)

Again, as I said before, it is predictably difficult to tease apart "teachers taking student concerns seriously" versus "teachers sharing their personal lives with students" versus "teachers working to get to know students." While each of these strategies offers the possibility of disrupting deficit assumptions, perhaps teachers who were able to use several of these strategies were better positioned to challenge deficit discourse in an ongoing manner.

Besides engaging in meaningful talk with students, Jonathon also made getting to know students' families a priority. He enjoyed the community garden that he helped build because it put him in contact with parents, students and students siblings. He also said he got to know parents through his involvement—and theirs—in after-school programs like the "President's Club for Young Men," a club that focused on developing leadership skills:

So, parents being involved with that and just kind of stepping outside the boundaries of being in the classroom, so to speak, I think made a big difference in how teachers view the teachers—or how, rather, parents view the teachers, view the school, because you had the feeling that teachers were very much invested in the total development of their child. While Jonathon grew to feel comfortable with his students’ families and the community, he also said talking to parents was a challenge, at least at first, and that TFA did not prepare him in that way. His reflections on figuring out how to call parents on the phone highlights the labor that is involved in building these relationships:

Jonathon: Just the logistics of interacting with all of the people in the learning community, the principal and namely the parents, I’m referring to. No one teaches you how to do that. That’s something that from day one, whether you’re a first-year teacher or a veteran teacher, there are issues that arise between students, between colleagues, between parents. Or there are parents having issues with the school or with their child. It’s really hard for anyone to prepare for, or for anyone to have you prepare for. That was difficult. I remember making first phone calls or contact with parents and just feeling on my own, and reaching out to colleagues at the time. It’s something that [TFA} ... I don’t want to say overlooked, but I definitely never received training. And I don’t know that even in traditional teacher preparation programs they really spend any time focusing on that, but that’s something that is a large part of your job that I felt very unprepared for. But again, on-the-job training came into play, definitely in that aspect.

Heidi: I love stories or specific examples. So, are there any... That's actually uncommon for me to hear that teachers have that much communication with parents, so that's interesting to me. Do you have any examples? I guess, give me a better sense of how you interacted with parents.

Jonathon: Even on the first couple days of school, I remember that first year... I can't remember details of specific conversations, but just picking up the phone to talk to a stranger essentially about someone that's very important to you, them obviously, and important to me and very much a part of their child's life, and just knowing how to... That interaction and those communication skills which are so important when you're trying to convey something of great importance.

I noticed how thoughtful Jonathon was in deciding what to say to parents and how to say it. While at other moments Jonathon seemed concerned about "negative" aspects of his students' home lives or neighborhoods, it is clear that he held students' parents in high regard and knew that they cared deeply about their children. Despite that his TFA preparation and his school did not offer guidance in how to communicate with parents, he did not allow this omission to change his mind that relationships with parents were vital. In another interview with Jonathon, he told a story of a mother who wrote him a long letter at the end of his last year of teaching, thanking him for the bond he had developed with her daughter. His careful consideration on how to connect with parents must have paid off because this mother included her personal phone number in the letter, so Jonathon was able to call her and the student over the summer.

Compare the parent relationships Jonathon spoke about to the way Anne talked about connecting with parents as a public relations or "PR move":

Another thing that Teach For America encourages is giving your cell phone to parents, a cell phone number to parents. And I know that's something that they appreciated. Almost as a... I would encourage that as a, really like a PR move (laughs) because honestly more people appreciated it than used it. I mean, I probably had in two years combined, maybe ten parents call me on my cell phone, most of which called me once. And that's about it.... As I said, it's something they don't really use, at least in my experience; it's something that at just the beginning of the year, they're, "Wow, this teacher's really available to us." I think for the most part, parents know... It's rare that there's something going on in the evening that really warrants bothering a teacher at home.

Anne describes a *show* of interest in and respect for parents, but she hoped parents would not be "bothering" her at home. Jonathon, on the other hand took seriously the task of connecting with parents, but I want to emphasize the time and effort it often takes to do this work. Here, Anne may not exhibit the respect for parents that Jonathon does; she does not seem to take them that seriously. However, I do not think that asking teachers to be available for parents and students at all times is necessarily the best way to build relationships with families, nor is it respectful of teachers' time, given the amount of time and work most teachers already put into teaching. If we decide that parent-teacher relationships are of *central* value, schools need to carve out time and space that reflects that central-ness, and that suits both parents and teachers.

Having High Expectations for Students

Many scholars have noted that part of being an excellent teacher means believing all students can achieve and taking responsibility in helping students to do so (Landsman & Lewis, 2006; Zeichner, 2003; Zeichner, 2009). Gorski (2013) includes access to higher-order pedagogies as a fundamental principle of achieving "equity literacy." Poor students and students

of color attending segregated urban schools notice their teachers' (and others') low expectations and are discouraged by them (Alonso, et al., 2009; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004). While low expectations for urban students are a large part of deficit thinking, some of the teachers I interviewed demonstrated how they were able to challenge deficit thinking and see their urban students as highly capable.

When Ben talked about the "extended learning cultural model" that he and other teachers, students, and university faculty had developed, his high expectations for students shone through. He said that "when we really had our extended learning cultural model moving, I felt prouder than I had ever felt to be teaching." This learning model was one of a number of projects that sought to "change the educational philosophy" of the school. The coalition that Ben was part of wanted "to develop a reform model that was explicitly founded upon educational justice and was supported by the union, and [they] really tried to connect with the community in a more substantial way." Their coalition received support from the Ford Foundation, as well as other foundations and community organizations, to build a model that engaged students by connecting classroom experiences to outside-of-the-classroom experiences like internships:

Ben: It's very difficult budget times and very difficult times in terms of the corporate school reform wars. I felt even in those times with those challenges, I felt prouder of what we were doing at Bennett with students than I had ever felt because I really felt like... Especially working with prominent black academics who get public education and who get teachers, I just felt like teachers were really coming to the fore and wanting to take leadership in things, wanting to think about how they do things in their classrooms differently to serve all students, wanting to work

together more. And we just had a bunch of great success stories with students who got involved in after-school activities and internships and things like that. You know, them getting paid to do surveys of access to healthy food in the community, getting paid to help develop urban farms in the community, getting involved in a whole bunch of stuff in policy battles at the city council around some of the school-to-prison pipeline stuff. We really saw students not just getting *involved* in those things, but actually using cognitive skills that they were learning in the classroom, you know skills like analysis and comparing things and contrasting things, and synthesizing different arguments, like really using those things that we were working on in the classroom to contribute to the community in some meaningful way. It just was very, very moving to be a part of that.

It is evident that Ben has access to a well-developed social justice framework, but it is also evident that he and his colleagues have high expectations for the kinds of work their students can do! Their reform efforts clearly did not attempt to “fix” something about students or seek to remediate them, as many urban reform projects intend to do, but they strove for access to meaningful, real-life projects for students where students’ skills and knowledge could be put to use to help solve public policy issues.

Pritika, while perhaps not as deliberately oriented toward social justice goals as Ben, also had high expectations of her students, and she incorporated higher-order pedagogy in her classroom:

Pritika: I’m a Social Studies teacher. I like when students ask questions about things that they don’t understand. A lot of things that I expose my students

to are things they have never heard of or seen about other cultures. I wanted to make sure that my students had a place where they could ask very honest questions, even if it wasn't politically correct, and learn from it. They like that. I wasn't a person that asked them questions, usually. I would only ask questions to check that they had listened to what I previously said. I built in a lot of things in my lessons that allowed them to ask questions. There were like games, types of things that made them create questions. They liked that a lot.

Heidi: They felt comfortable with you enough to ask.

Pritika: Yeah. I got a pretty wide range of types of questions.

Heidi: Like what?

Pritika: You got questions about... We had this dice game, for instance, where you roll the dice and if you get a five, you ask a "why" question" If you roll a four, you asked a "who" question. If you rolled a two, you asked a "how" question—something like that. You would get various questions like, "Oh, how did they get food?" if we were learning about the so-called "Blue Men of the deserts" in Africa. I would say, "Oh, well, how do you think that they found food? Let's look at this environment." We would break it down to...questions that were like, I don't know, "Why do we think that all of Africa is so poor? Why do we only see commercials about..."

Heidi: That's a great question.

Pritika: "... poor kids, and you're telling us that people have these kingdoms?" I would teach them a lot about how children go to schools in different

places. PBS had this great series about going back to school. They highlighted how students got prepared for school all around the world.

Heidi: Oh, that's cool.

Pritika: Kids loved that, especially when we were concentrating in places like Asia. All throughout Asia and Africa. They spotlighted different parts of Africa and different parts of Asia. The students had so many questions. They would question stereotypes that they saw on commercials here in the States.

Heidi: Right. Our system's always like, "famine babies."

Pritika: Yeah, famine and flies and... They had questions about poverty, like, "Oh that's how we go to school. We do the same thing." They liked that.

Pritika knew that her students might not have been exposed to certain cultures—or to certain critical questions about how those "other" cultures are represented—but she did not see this lack of exposure as a deficit that students brought. On the contrary, she had to think highly of her students for them to be able to pose thoughtful questions. For something like her dice game to work, she had to see students as curious, engaged learners, and she had to be willing to share authority with students (Oyler, 1996). Further, students did not ask questions about any trivial subject, but Pritika helped them consider sophisticated topics of sameness and difference and representation.

Conclusion

The data discussed here show that deficit thinking is pervasive and powerful but not fully determining. Some teachers cracked deficit discourse intermittently. In order to challenge the very available deficit framework, teachers had to be able to draw upon alternate frameworks or

engage in practices that took students seriously. While TFA and Project Voice are both “equity-minded” approaches, they did not guarantee that teachers would counter deficit ideas and practices. Something like Project Voice that strove to help students represent themselves and their knowledge of school in a new light may be an important first step, but it was not enough for the teachers to *maintain* a frameworks or relationships that countered deficit discourse.

Teachers like Ben, who not only employed critical and social justice frameworks, but who also had strong relationships with students and parents and who really worked to become *part* of the community where he taught, fared better against deficit discourse. Maddie also interacted with her students in her everyday life at church and the community pool. Perhaps this was what made her seem “real” to many of her students. Jonathon, too, worked to become part of his students’ out-of-school lives. While he said he felt like a bit of an outsider to his students’ community, he worked purposefully to build relationships with students and families and saw these relationships as central to his teaching. Rather than seeing urban students as “special” or thinking of their work in urban schools as an exceptional experience, teachers who were able to move toward having more *mundane, ordinary* interactions and relationships with students seemed better equipped to challenge deficit thinking.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusions

Through interviews with urban teachers, I gained insight into the complexities of their work in urban public schools and into their perceptions of the obstacles they faced. Analyzing their talk allowed for a fine-grained understanding of how teachers navigated deficit discourse, a racialized framework that constructed their students in harmful ways, as well as neoliberal discourse, which had harmful consequences for teachers themselves. While educational researchers have studied the effects of neoliberal and deficit logics on education, few studies consider both forces simultaneously. This study's research questions aimed to consider both of these forces and to better understand how they interconnected in urban teachers' daily lives. Examining how urban teachers negotiated both neoliberal and deficit discourse offered a complex view of their work—a view that did not let me regard urban teachers as mere *perpetrators* of deficit thinking, who are thus in need of reform, or let me see teachers as mere *victims* of neoliberal logics and practices.

Indeed, the interconnected nature of these two forces works to maintain *both* teachers and students as objects of blame. Considering only one of the two discourses, as my participants often did, allowed both discourses to remain intact. Teachers felt constrained by market-based measures, and they sometimes offered structural critiques of these measures. However, this structural view did not extend to urban students; teachers did not have a similar understanding of the discourses in which their students were caught. In fact, the deficit discourse was so unwavering, that teachers' budding critiques of neoliberal practices needed not bloom because deficit discourse provided an explanation of the “real” problem—the urban students themselves.

Urban teachers are less often “bad” individuals holding racist, classist views. They are more often people immersed in colorblind, individualistic discourses without access to more critical frameworks for thinking and talking about racism and poverty (Leonardo, 2013). This project did not intend to reproduce teachers as problems but rather aimed to explore the complexities of urban teachers’ work. This research took teachers seriously, examined teachers’ meaning-making practices, and emphasized their perspectives and voices, which are largely absent in public discourse. Better understanding how urban teachers gave into and resisted deficit and other harmful discourses allows us to better support teachers in interrupting these frames.

In the following sections, I review the significant findings from each of the data chapters (Chapters Four, Five and Six). I then discuss possible implications of these findings; I describe how this work can matter in the areas of teacher knowledge, teacher unions, and teacher turnover and teachers’ working conditions. I end with a discussion on potential “next steps” in this line of research.

Central Findings

Through their talk, the urban teachers in this study relied upon and largely upheld deficit constructions of urban students and families. Chapter Four describes how teachers saw urban youth and urban schools as *less than*, as *different*. Deficit discourse allowed teachers to talk about urban students in class- and race-coded ways, without fear of being called out on racist or classist views. Deficit views were very *allowed* in this sense, and they materialized themselves and were maintained through school practices around behavior and control. Deficit discourse also seemed to work alongside discourses of childhood and development, and these positioned students as less than or as incomplete adults. Jack, for instance, saw his middle school students as in need of control not only because of the challenges associated with their race or with

poverty, but because of the challenges of *puberty*. While teachers routinely perceived students as *lack* instead of *as competent* or *as learners*, teachers sometimes talked about challenges that students faced, rather than seeing students themselves as challenges. That is, the urban teachers sometimes hinted at an understanding of their students' struggles *outside* of a deficit explanation. When Pritika talked about bullying issues and the ways her students "started becoming a lot more hostile toward each other," she saw that her students were missing something but did not see them through a deficit lens. Pritika's school consciously attempted to distinguish between saying simply that the students' "community is very challenging," and understanding the challenging factors that the community faced. However, most teachers I talked with did not have the frameworks or language to make this kind of distinction.

While Chapter Four demonstrates the power of deficit discourse, Chapter Six offers hope and shows that teachers could sometimes break out of a deficit view of urban students. Some of the teachers' relationships with students acted as a counter to deficit discourse. In order to have the kind of relationship that interrupted deficit ideas and practices, teachers needed access to an *alternative* (non-deficit) *framework* or needed some other way of *taking students seriously*. To challenge deficit discourse, Andre and Christine employed culturally-relevant approaches, for example, while Ben used social justice and anti-racist frameworks, and Nisha relied on an inclusion model. Perhaps particularly helpful were alternative frameworks that were supported on a school-wide level, as was the case at Pritika's school where teachers openly talked about resisting a savior approach in teaching urban students. Teachers also disrupted deficit discourse in using combinations of the following strategies, many of which are also highlighted as good practices in literature on teaching marginalized students: positioning themselves on the "same plane" as students; understanding (versus dismissing) students' behavior and concerns; having

high academic expectations for students; allowing students to get to know them; and making an effort to get to know students.

While Chapter Six revealed that deficit discourse is crackable and is not all-encompassing, data discussed in Chapter Five demonstrate that deficit discourse is, in part, maintained and supported through another powerful discourse: neoliberalism. Chapter Five examines how neoliberalism functions within education to constrain teachers' work. Teachers made sense of their work and the profession of teaching by navigating neoliberal logics and practices around competition, efficiency, strict accountability and surveillance. While teachers identified these kinds of practices as constraints and were critical of them, teachers also continued to construct urban students themselves as constraints. The deficit discourse remained accessible. The explanatory power of deficit discourse that produces urban students as *problems* provided teachers with an easy target, allowing them to believe that maybe they could and would be successful according to the market-based rules—if it just were not for “these kids.” Deficit thinking is pervasive even in non-neoliberal moments, but blaming urban students is intensified when teachers are also at high risk of being blamed.

Implications

Teacher Knowledge

This dissertation's findings suggest that urban teachers would benefit from greater knowledge of how inequality works; they would benefit from what Gorski (2013) calls “equity literacy,” as well as what Guinier (2004) and others have called “racial literacy” (Rogers & Mosley, 2008; Stevenson, 2014). Gorski (2013) argues that educators need to understand poverty as part of a *system* of inequality. He urges teachers to recognize and dismantle their own negative assumptions about poor students—assumptions that are often rooted in a “culture of poverty”

framework, and that can seep into their instruction and interactions with poor students. Racial literacy means being able to use race “as a lens” to understand school and other social practices (Rogers & Mosley, 2008, p. 108), despite the prevalence of colorblind ideology. A racially literate perspective “involves a set of tools...that allow individuals (both people of color and White folks) to describe, interpret, explain and act on the constellation of practices...that comprise racism and anti-racism” (p. 110). Teachers in my study who had access to social justice frameworks, or other frameworks that helped them to understand power and inequity, were at times able to interrupt deficit discourse.

I write about these implications for teacher knowledge while being keenly aware that many researchers and reformers—including those neoliberal “reformers” of whom I am critical—often land on a “teacher problem” that needs fixing. Again, I do not intend this dissertation to conclude with, “Here’s another thing that teachers are doing wrong,” or “Here is another thing teachers do not know, but should.” Nor do I want to land on *teacher education* as being simply inadequate. Targeting the “monopoly” of purportedly failing university-based teacher preparation programs is a popular extension of the teacher-blaming rhetoric (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001). On the contrary, I aim to interrupt these simplistic blaming narratives, not add to them. I am attracted to thoughtful professional development opportunities like the ones that García and Guerra (2004) describe. These opportunities push teachers to take seriously their role in maintaining deficit beliefs, while not reducing systems of racism and poverty to the individual level. García and Guerra offer teachers of urban students and other marginalized students ways to disrupt deficit beliefs *without* simply making teachers the new objects of blame: “[I]t is important to avoid centering on teachers as the problem, which detracts from the critical

examination of systemic factors that perpetuate deficit thinking and reproduce educational inequities for students from nondominant sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds” (p. 154).

While urban teachers would indeed benefit from greater understandings of how systems of inequality harm their students, teachers also need to become more literate in understanding their *own* marginalized positions as public workers. Chapter Five demonstrates that the teachers were able to clearly recognize some of the constraints they faced as workers. Teachers were aware that they lacked opportunities to collaborate with other teachers, for instance. They experienced pressures around testing and saw how testing compelled them into competition with other teachers. They noticed that they often had little say into what they taught, or even how their work day was scheduled. However, teachers did not talk about these constraints as interrelated under a larger neoliberal project. I believe only Ben actually used the term “neoliberalism.” Teachers also often *consented* to neoliberal logics, even as they were harmed by them. They sometimes took up the very discourses of blame that harmed them and deployed them against other “bad teachers.” Perhaps teachers consenting to the now widespread and “commonsensical” neoliberal logic is not surprising, but it suggests that teachers would benefit from a greater understanding of this discourse.

My findings demonstrate that deficit discourse and neoliberal discourse are intertwined. Even as they are different, urban teachers’ struggles are interconnected with their students’ struggles. Better educating teachers about this interconnectedness means not only providing them with an accurate account of how power works, but I believe it is also strategic. Teachers engaged in *critical talk* about many aspects of urban school life, and while not all teachers worried about deficit constructions of urban students, most *were* critical of neoliberal effects that they themselves directly faced. If we can show teachers who initially may not be so interested in

social justice aims—teachers who might resist considering how racism and poverty harm their students, and especially who might resist considering their own role in maintaining these systems—that their students’ struggles are actually connected to their own struggles, we may convince them to struggle against deficit discourse and to interrogate their own deficit views. Without taking stock of how these discourses buttress one another, teachers like Erica may start with a critique of testing—that constrains both her and her students—only to have that critique squashed by deficit discourse that comes along to legitimize that testing works, just not with “these kids.”

Teacher Unions

Unions may have an important role in raising teachers’ consciousness about their position as public workers in this neoliberal era. While schools of education and leaders in staff development have a responsibility to educate teachers about social inequality, I believe teacher unions should be a space where this knowledge can take root for teachers, as well. Because of the ways the urban teachers’ working conditions overlap with urban students’ learning conditions, unions must also be better at advocating more directly for *student* needs, in addition to teacher needs. Or, if unions are already doing this work, they need to publicize this work! Organizer, educator and current President of the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), Karen Lewis, noted that during the Chicago teacher strikes, the CTU made alliances with parents and other groups, and they found that while “people actually like teachers,” they traditionally had negative views of unions (Sokolower, 2012, p. 15). CTU had to purposefully combat this negative image, and the visibility of the strike gave CTU the opportunity to show that teachers and their unions are in fact knowledgeable and interested in broader coalitional work—including fighting for justice for their students. Scholars point to teacher unions that already have a conscious social

justice orientation and that address more than “bread and butter” issues (Compton & Weiner, 2008; Swalwell, 2014; Weiner, 2012); these unions practice “social justice unionism” or support the idea of a “social movement union” (Weiner, 2012, p. 197). As the pushback against high-stakes testing and other market-based reform grows, especially among parents and students, teacher unions have an opportunity to join with students and their communities and continue to connect the dots between their shared interests.

Reducing Teacher Turnover

My findings about urban teachers’ working conditions and about what influences them to leave the profession have implications for reducing teacher turnover. We should want to preserve teachers’ good working conditions, not only because teachers and other workers should have job stability—this is an important end in itself!—but high turnover rates are also connected to lowered student achievement (Goldstein, 2014; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2012). In addition to lower scores in math and ELA, Goldstein (2014) points out other harmful effects of high teacher turnover that are “common sense”: “[A]dministrators spend more time recruiting, interviewing, and hiring, when they could be focused on improving instruction. When many teachers resign each year, institutional memory is lost, and ties to the community weaken” (p. 251). Erica and other teachers worried about the “shiny”-ness of being a young, new teacher wearing off and about the sustainability of teaching under neoliberal conditions. Kelly left working at a charter school because of the long hours, for instance. But Kelly recognized that turnover was largely accepted by school leaders, in a sense; she said the mentality of her administration was that “if you can’t do it, we have this feeder called Teach For America,” and that staff leaving each year had become part of the normal system.

Both the literature on high teacher turnover's effects on student achievement—especially for low-performing and black students (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2012)—and the data from this study that show how teachers are pressured to leave teaching because of neoliberal practices, should make us want to improve these working conditions. These findings should also have implications for rethinking TFA and other programs that do not encourage teachers to stay in the classroom as long as they could: “[S]chools simply do not have an unlimited capacity to absorb and train first-year teachers.... Where schools do need to hire newcomers, they’d be better off hiring ones who will stay” (Goldstein, 2014, p. 251).

Again, to take a strategic approach, even if one does not care so much for teachers’ well-being but *does* care about students, the call to reduce teacher turnover should still resonate. It is also important to note that the ability for urban teachers to use those strategies that fought deficit thinking, is related to the conditions that would improve teachers own working conditions and that might decrease turnover. For example, to challenge deficit discourse, particular kinds of teacher-student relationships were needed, but those relationships required *time*—something teachers wanted more of! More time to collaborate with teachers and more freedom to interact with students in meaningful ways are not the wishes of greedy urban teachers, but these are changes that would improve the lives of both teachers and students.

Next Steps

In this ongoing work, an important next step will be to explore the intersections of *gender* and neoliberalism in the context of teachers’ work. The feminized nature of the education profession (e.g. Acker, 1983; Biklen, 1995; Grumet, 1988) constructs teachers as in need of surveillance and discipline, and it opens the door to current neoliberal “solutions” like merit pay, high-stakes testing, hyper-credentialing, the publishing of teachers’ ratings and other

“performance indicators.” These policies demand strict accountability from teachers, and the public continues to scrutinize, distrust, and demand more and more of teachers and teacher educators. However, the gendered aspect of the current neoliberal context has been under-theorized. How are these ideas and policies also gendered? While scholars have recognized how neoliberalism reshapes “the good teacher” (Connell, 2009) and redefines “teacher quality” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006), there has been less consideration of how the gendering of teaching allows for and furthers this reshaping. I want to examine how gendered and neoliberal logics intertwine to constrain educators. How do educators negotiate—sometimes transgress and sometimes give in to—these two forces? How do these forces collude to mold educational policy, conceptualizations of teachers and teaching, and teachers’ working conditions?

Enduring Questions

What does it take to educate marginalized students? This dissertation has intended to answer a small piece of this question. When we fail poor youth and youth of color, we too often jump to blame their teachers. (Or, we blame the youth themselves.) Rooted in democratic, social justice education, this study did not blame teachers, but it *did* look to teachers in answering this question. What is the teacher’s role in educating urban students? How do we honor the difference that teachers can and do make without focusing excessively or exclusively on teachers? In considering this important question—*what does it take to educate marginalized students?*—we cannot preclude a consideration of *the well-being of the students’ teachers!* How do we ask a lot of an urban teacher without blaming her, and without forsaking her own well-being? If in striving to improve educational experiences for urban and other marginalized students we marginalize teachers, then we are not fully enacting a social justice practice.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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Education

Syracuse University **December 2014**
 Ph.D. Candidate, Cultural Foundations of Education, Sociology of Education
 Dissertation title: *Deficit Discourse, Urban Teachers' Work, and the Blame Game*

Certificate of Advanced Study (C.A.S.), Women's and Gender Studies

University of Cincinnati **2007**
 M.A., Women's Studies
 Thesis title: *No Child Left Behind or Every Teacher under Surveillance?: Revealing Patriarchal Ideologies of Surveillance and Control*

Syracuse University **2005**
 B.A., Dual Major: Women's Studies and Advertising

Current Position

Visiting Faculty, St. Lawrence University **Fall 2013-present**
 Full-time position in the Education Department
 Teaching responsibilities have included the following courses: EDUC 203 "Contemporary Issues in American Education"; EDUC 247 "Teaching and Learning in Urban Contexts"; EDUC 519 "Educational Statistics and Research"; and two freshman seminars: "Sex, School and Gender Roles" and "Revisiting, Representing and Reimagining Education"

Teaching

Instructor: SPF 520 "Teacher-Learner, Research and Inquiry," Summers 2012 & 2013.
 Nazareth College of Rochester, Social and Psychological Foundations of Education Dept.

Instructor: FSA 400 "Foundations of Ed: The School in American Society," Spring 2013.
 SUNY Cortland, Foundations and Social Advocacy Dept.

Instructor: FSA 525 "Teaching the Inner-City Child," Fall 2012.*
 SUNY Cortland, Foundations and Social Advocacy Dept.

*I did not name this course!

Instructor: CFE 300/600 "Media Literacy, Education and Youth Culture," Summer 2010.
Syracuse University, Cultural Foundations of Education Dept.

Instructor: CFE 362/SOC 400 "Youth, Schooling, and Popular Culture," Spring 2009.
Syracuse University, Cultural Foundations of Education Dept.

Instructor: "Introduction to Women's Studies," Summer 2006.
University of Cincinnati, Women's Studies Dept.

Research

Dissertation: Deficit Discourse, Urban Teachers' Work, and the Blame Game
I study how urban teachers experience the "blame game." Public sentiment faults teachers for the problems of schools, and educational practices constrain their work. This qualitative interpretive study examines how urban teachers must navigate two intersecting forces that create this context of blame: the strict, market-based accountability model currently applied to teachers and other public workers, and the racialized "deficit discourse" that prevails in urban schools, an approach that blames poor people and people of color for the problems of urban schools. This dissertation considers how urban teachers' work and relationships with students suffer under these pressures.

Research Assistant: "Smart Kids, Visual Stories" project, Fall 2007-Spring 2012
Smart Kids, Visual Stories was a Chancellor's Leadership research project at Syracuse University, funded by the Carnegie Foundation, in which urban K-8 students created digital videos that represented their experience of urban education. In sharing their knowledge and perspectives on urban schooling, students engaged in a critical literacy project and became collaborators in reform instead of objects of reform. The project was rooted in "student voice" literature and intended to combat the deficit approach that is prevalent in urban schools.

Publications

Pitzer, H. (2014). The authority of experience, deficit discourse and Teach For America: The risks for urban education. In V. Ellis, & J. Orchard (Eds.), *Learning teaching from experience: Multiple perspectives, international contexts*. London: Bloomsbury.

Pitzer, H. (2010). "What's best for kids" vs. teacher unions: How Teach For America blames teacher unions for the problems of urban schools. *Workplace*, 17, 61-74.

"Population Policy." (2008). Entry in A. Lind, & S. Brzuzy (Eds.), *Battleground: Women, gender and sexuality*, Vol. 2 (p. 421-428). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

In progress: Pitzer, H., & Biklen, S. "Schools aren't supposed to let you down": Deficit discourses, student knowledge, and urban school reform.

In progress: Biklen, S. K., Pitzer, H., & Nguyen, N. The social construction of urban students as unbelievable: A call for counter-listening.

In progress: Roberts, S., Pitzer, H., & Weiner, L. A feminist offensive to the neoliberal witch hunt on teachers and teaching.

In progress: Biklen, S. K., Nguyen, N., & Pitzer, H. The politics of talk about schools: Power relations in qualitative research with children.

Conference Presentations

Pitzer, H. "Teachers Blaming 'Other Teachers': Considering Neoliberal Constraints in Urban Education," Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA). Philadelphia, April 3-7, 2014.

Pitzer, H. "Neoliberal Constructions of Time: Considering Constraints on Urban Teachers' Work," 43rd Annual Meeting of the New York State Foundations of Education Association (NYSFEA). Colgate University, Hamilton, February 28-March 1, 2014

Dodd, S., & Pitzer, H. "Lessons Learned from Graduates of a Cultural Contexts Course," Annual Meeting of the National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME). Oakland, CA, November 6-10, 2013.

Orsati, F., Pitzer, H., & Rood, C. "Unproductive 'Others' and 'Wasteful' Knowledge: Deconstructing Neoliberal Discourse in Urban and Special Education," Annual Meeting of the Society for Disability Studies (SDS). Orlando, June 26-29, 2013

Pitzer, H. "Deficit and Neoliberal Discourses, Urban Teachers' Work, and the Blame Game," Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA). San Francisco, April 27-May 1, 2013

Roberts, S., Pitzer, H., & Weiner, L. "A Feminist Offensive to the Neoliberal Witch Hunt on Teachers and Teaching," Annual Meeting of the American Educational Studies Association (AESA). Seattle, October 31-November 4, 2012

Pitzer, H. "Urban Teachers and the Dual Discourses of Blame: Deficit and Neoliberal Discourses," Annual Meeting of the American Educational Studies Association (AESA). Seattle, October 31-November 4, 2012

Biklen, S. K., & Pitzer, H. "The Social Construction of Urban Students as Unbelievable: A Call for 'Disruptive Listening,'" Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA). Vancouver, April 13-17, 2012

Pitzer, H. "Teach For America as a Neoliberal, Experience-Credentialing Technology," 41st Annual Meeting of the New York State Foundations of Education Association (NYSFEA). Geneva, March 30-31, 2012

Pitzer, H. "The Authority of Experience, Teach For America, and Deficit Discourse," Oxford Centre for Sociocultural and Activity Theory Research (OCAT) Research Symposium: "What and how do teachers learn from experience?", supported by the Society for Educational Studies (SES). University of Oxford. Oxford, UK, October 23-25, 2011

Biklen, S. K., & Pitzer, H. "'Schools Aren't Supposed to Let You Down': Challenging Deficit Discourses with Student Collaborators for Urban School Reform," Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA). New Orleans, April 8-12, 2011

Pitzer, H. "Deficit Discourses, Urban Teachers, and the Blame Game," 40th Annual Meeting of the New York State Foundations of Education Association (NYSFEA). Rochester, March 25-26, 2011

Pitzer, H. "The Complexity of Listening to Teachers' Voices When Deficit Discourses Rule the School," Annual Meeting of the American Educational Studies Association (AESA). Denver, October 27-31, 2010

Pitzer, H. "Negotiations in an Urban School Reform Project," 3rd Annual Central New York Conference on Public Scholarship in Graduate Education, in association with Imagining America. Syracuse, April 9, 2010

Pitzer, H. "Experience *as* Difference: Teach For America Teachers in Urban Schools," Annual Meeting of the American Educational Studies Association (AESA). Pittsburgh, November 4-8, 2009

Pitzer, H. "Constructing Scapegoats and Saviors: Teach for America as a Neoliberal Organizing Technology," Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA). San Diego, April 13-17, 2009

Pitzer, H. "The Perils and Possibilities of Using Discourses of Terror for Progressive Purposes," The Human Condition Series 2nd Annual Conference, Topic: Terror. Barrie, Ontario, Canada, May 2-3, 2008

Pitzer, H. "No Child Left Behind or Every Teacher under Surveillance?: Revealing Patriarchal Ideologies of Surveillance and Control," UCLA Center for the Study of Women, Thinking Gender Conference. Los Angeles, February 1, 2008

Pitzer, H. "No Child Left Behind or Every Child under Surveillance?: Feminist Pedagogy for Counter-Hegemonic Resistance," National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) 28th Annual Conference. St. Charles, IL, June 28-July 1, 2007

Pitzer, H. "Critical Reflections on Feminist Study Abroad," Women's Studies department presentation, University of Cincinnati. May 17, 2007

Professional Development and Invited Presentations

Professional development for Academic Enrichment Specialists: "Critical Issues in Urban Education and Urban Communities," Say Yes to Education, Syracuse University, February 21, 2013

Professional development for high school tutors: "High Expectations for Urban Students," Say Yes to Education, Syracuse University, September 21 & 22, 2012

Professional development for high school tutors: "Urban Schools: Challenging Assumptions and Setting High Expectations," Say Yes to Education, Syracuse University, June 28 & 29, 2012

K-12 Experience

Instructor, "Sociology of Race and Gender," Syracuse City School District (SCSD) high schools, Say Yes to Education, Syracuse, NY, Winter/Spring 2013

Supervisor, Say Yes Collegiate Preparatory Academy (SYCPA) tutoring program, Say Yes to Education, Syracuse City School District (SCSD), Syracuse, NY, Fall 2011-Summer 2013

Curriculum Developer, 6-week "Pi Day" math program, Say Yes to Education, Syracuse City School District (SCSD) elementary schools, Syracuse, NY, Spring 2012 and Spring 2013

Educator/Fieldworker, *Smart Kids, Visual Stories* digital/critical literacy project, Levy K-8 School, Syracuse City School District (SCSD), Syracuse, NY, Fall 2007-Spring 2012

Teacher Artist, Say Yes to Education, Van Duyn Elementary School, Syracuse, NY, Summer and Fall 2009

Service

Invited talk: "What can you do with an undergraduate degree in Women's & Gender Studies?" Women's and Gender Studies Dept., Syracuse University, November 30, 2009

Student Representative, Cultural Foundations or Education Dept., Syracuse University, Fall 2008-Spring 2010

Awards/Honors

Marguerite Fischer Undergraduate Paper Prize in Women's Studies, Syracuse University, 2004

Related Professional Experience

Supervisor, Say Yes Collegiate Preparatory Academy (SYCPA) tutoring program, Say Yes to Education, Syracuse City School District (SCSD), Syracuse, NY, Fall 2011-Summer 2013

Graduate Assistant, Office of the University Ombuds, University of Cincinnati, Fall 2005-Summer 2007

Education Department Assistant, Planned Parenthood Southwest Ohio (PPSWO), Summer 2006

Professional Associations

American Educational Research Association (AERA) – member

American Educational Studies Association (AESA) – member

New York State Foundations of Education Association (NYSFEA) – member

National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) – member

Research Software Experience

Studio Code – Video analysis software

NVivo – Qualitative research software

ATLAS.ti – Qualitative research software

References

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